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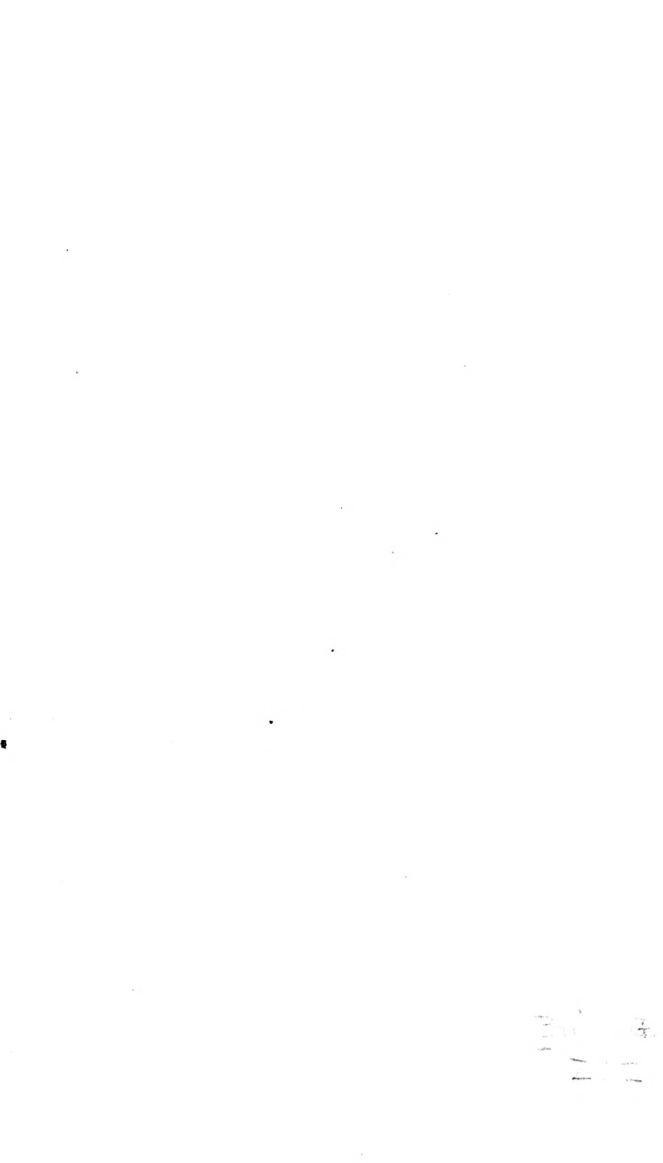
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THE
BOW IN THE CLOUD:
DISCOURSES

BY

GEORGE WARE BRIGGS,

MINISTER OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN BALEM, MASS.

(*Unitarian.*)

"Behold the rainbow's form,
Hung on the brow of heaven!
The glory of the passing storm,
The pledge of mercy given."

NEW EDITION ENLARGED.

BOSTON AND CAMBRIDGE.
JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY.

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CAMBRIDGE:
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TO
REV. JAMES KENDALL, D. D.,

SENIOR MINISTER OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN PLYMOUTH, MASS.,

THESE DISCOURSES

ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

AS A MEMORIAL

OF A CONNECTION OF UNBROKEN HARMONY,

DURING

FIFTEEN YEARS OF AN ASSOCIATED MINISTRY.

P R E F A C E.

THE fifteen Discourses which were published in the first edition of this book, have been revised for re-publication. Those which bear the following titles, — “Sorrow incidental to Man’s Greatness,” “Conflicting Views of Providence,” “The Pilgrimage of Life,” “The Ministry of Nature to Human Grief,” “Action, not Repose, the Heavenly Rest,” “Visions of the Spirit-world,” “Spiritual Equality revealed through Suffering,” “Life a Sealed Book,” and “Age like the Noon-day,” — are now printed for the first time.

The original character of the book has not been changed, although an attempt has been made to give a little more variety to its contents. If, in its more imperfect form, it has met the

wants of sorrowing hearts, the Author hopes that it will now be regarded as more worthy of a favorable reception.

The dates at the end of these Discourses will be unmeaning to most readers; but to those who heard them, and to the writer himself, they recall hours of the deepest experience.

Another book has lately been published with the same title. This fact may be the occasion of some confusion; but it presents no sufficient reason for changing the title of a new edition of the present work.

SALEM, (Mass.,) December, 1853.

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S E R M O N S .

I.

SORROW INCIDENTAL TO MAN'S GREATNESS.

IN MUCH WISDOM IS MUCH GRIEF: AND HE THAT INCREASETH KNOWLEDGE INCREASETH SORROW. — Ecclesiastes i. 18.

THE text is the cry of a sceptic, who lived and wrote some centuries before the birth of Jesus. In the comparative darkness which then covered the world, and in the deeper darkness of his own doubts, the writer stood and speculated, like a man feeling his way in the thickest night, — only to be made more conscious at every step of the uncertainty and gloom. What men termed wisdom, brought only vexation to his spirit. It did not remove his doubts, or give the much desired repose. Its promise of rest was a cheat. The unsatisfied heart returned from its inquiries with a still heavier burden of doubt, to repeat again its old lamentation, — “Vanity of vanities ; all is vanity.”

I will not bring the sceptic's cry to the altar of faith and hope. I will not reproduce the sadness of this ancient unbeliever in the place where Jesus is commemorated, and amid the light which flows from his teaching and his life. Yet there is one truth which is suggested by the words of the text, that belongs to no peculiar age, and to no special mood of the mind. It involves one sentiment which is the expression of a permanent experience of human nature. "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow," is the affirmation of the text. That is to say, man's liability to suffering is in proportion to his greatness. We leave the sceptical exaggeration, and catch the universal truth contained in the words, and repeat, — that the keenness and depth of human suffering, the exposure to suffering itself, all spring from the greatness of the soul. The unthinking brute does not suffer as man suffers. The wailings and griefs of man are proofs and prophecies of his worth and greatness. This ray of light breaks through every cloud of grief; and the more mournful, the more profound you represent those wailings and griefs to be, the more does this thought overspread and cheer the night of sorrow with serene and heavenly light.

Let us approach gradually towards the doctrine that we wish to illustrate. There is one introductory thought which partially harmonizes even with the words of the text. As life opens its deep meaning to man, as knowledge increases and experience becomes profound, sorrow does not indeed increase, but a view of things which is tinged with thoughtful sadness fills the mind. Youth sees the hill before it, rising as an enchanting

slope of verdure and of beauty; and with a cry of joy it rushes towards the summit. But man finds it difficult to climb the steep. Though it does not seem sad, but must seem glorious, yet he feels it to be a serious thing to live. Life is not a holiday amusement. It is a grand, majestic work; a work that is grand enough to enkindle an angel's ambition, and engage an angel's power. The problems of existence appear more profound as he journeys forward. He feels the peril of temptation. He realizes the power of passion; and as he struggles against the world and his own sinful desire, he looks with increasing and almost despairing reverence upon the victory of Jesus in his temptation, and adores that perfect singleness of heart for which he longs, yet feels it to be almost impossible to gain. He fathoms the depths of grief; and as affection pleads and weeps in its agony, he looks at Jesus in Gethsemane, and perceives the majesty of the trust which said through his lips, "Thy will be done." He feels the dread pressure of responsibility; and he stands in awe before that great conviction, inwrought into the undying conscience, which commands him to work with a ceaseless energy that resembles the eternal energy of God, and which kindles the fire that is not quenched within every faltering soul. It is enchanting to go out upon the sea where every billow rolls in beauty beneath the smiling sky. But the storm may lash into wrath the waters which sparkle in the sunlight now. So it is enchanting to begin the voyage of life in the brightness of youthful hope. Yet though the soul may gather treasures in the voyage, still there are tempests and wrecks and deaths to tell the peril of the venture.

There are moral disasters, wrecked souls in the world, more numerous than the fragments of gallant vessels and the relics of the dead that pave the bottom of the sea. When man looks around and within, the serious view of life quickly takes the place of the once bright and unreflecting expectation.

Indeed, we may press the image that has just been used still further. There is something even in the experience of successful voyagers that brings this seriousness of view ; a seriousness that increases in proportion to their success. Through frequent tempests and innumerable dangers the mariner pursues his daring course, and returns freighted with the wealth of distant lands. So the soul wins the grandest moral treasures by the grandest toil. The world's great spiritual victories have been purchased by blood. Sainly men, who gained an almost spotless purity, scourged their rebellious passions as mistaken devotees scourged their quivering flesh. They endured the cross and despised the shame for the glory that was set before them. Yet were there thorns in every martyr's crown. Martyr ! The term itself, like the word Calvary, mingles the idea of suffering with thoughts of triumph and of glory. Even successful voyagers, we repeat, acquire this seriousness of view, as through waves and clouds and storms they shape their course over the sea of life towards the throne of God.

The increase of knowledge does not bring an increase of sorrow ; yet there is a seriousness which comes with matured thought and profound experience. We are shocked by levity when it is associated with age. We feel that the soul must have learned enough in the

struggle of years to lead it to a grave, although a serene joy. The marks of serious thought dignify the brow of the noblest men. A sense of infinite truth and beauty overshadows the spirit of genius, and chastens it into reverence. The shallow streams leap with noisy flow; but the deep floods are still. It has been said, "We are never told that Jesus smiled, but that he wept." We repel every theory which associates gloom with Him who brought the peace of God as His gift to men. But when a mind is awakened, like the mind of Jesus, to the infinite law of God and the vast problem of a world's redemption, we expect to see a deep solemnity in its thought. Its joys will be pervaded by the spirit of its prayer. Indeed, whence comes the strong tendency, to which we have referred, to associate gloom with Christianity and with Jesus himself; to forget that religion is the divine definition of joy? It comes from the conviction of the seriousness of the soul's life in all deep experience, according to the revelations of Christian truth; the seriousness of a life which must meet temptation, suffering, death, in its way to the judgment seat of God. It is natural that what is in itself so intensely serious should be sometimes regarded with gloom. It is often hard, amidst deep experience, to retain the spirit of joy. It is hard, amidst deserted homes and multiplying graves, to prevent the clouds from veiling the sun. It is difficult to retain the flush and brightness of the morning of life throughout its toiling noon and its darkening eve. The serious view of life will come, if not the sad one. The text involves a sentiment which finds its interpretation and its proof in the profound experience of all living men.

But this preliminary consideration must not detain us longer. The greatness and depth of human suffering, as we at first affirmed, demonstrate, and proceed from, the greatness of the soul. The truth of this position is confirmed by many illustrations. Why is pain so keen and so excruciating? It is because our capacity to feel is so great. If we are so keenly alive to sensations of pleasure, which, like electric fires, thrill through every fibre of the system, we must be equally alive to sensations of pain. What is the anguish of desolate homes, when the arms are stretched out to clasp a vanished form, and the voice calls a child, friend, parent, who is lost from earth, and the heart pines for the love which has been the light and the repose of life? It is but the counterpart of the joy of these homes that are still unbereaved, and which gushes out beneath the roofs that cover the unbroken circles of affection. It is because affection is so deep, that the snapping of its bonds brings a pain like mortal agony. Every tear which falls upon the grave, every pang which pierces the mourner's breast, is a testimony to the greatness of the human heart. It is because the Eden of love was so fair, and its joy so pure, that the anguish of the soul becomes so keen. And what is the bitterness of remorse, which the Scriptures describe in such fearful images; and in comparison with which the pain of bereavement alone is the luxury of bliss? Why is remorse so terrible, when the smouldering fire of self-reproach, kindled by some daring deed of wickedness, breaks into consuming flame in the sinner's breast? Why is it so deep when it crushes the obdurate will, and compels guilty lips to confess deeds of shame and

blood, and drives men to seek punishment for their crimes, as an atonement for their sin? Could we open the fearful and blazing hell which sometimes rages in the guilty breast, what dread, yet glorious implications of the greatness of the soul would be discerned in every element of its torture? The sin, when it is fully realized, brings such damning shame, because holiness brings such divine peace. The hell is so fierce and dread, because the heaven is so glorious. It is a nature of divine parentage that suffers, — a nature that was made to know something of the bliss of the infinite God. And the suffering, in every form of experience, must be a counterpart to the glory.

Man is exposed to suffering in consequence of the greatness of his nature. The depth of his being may make his pains as keen as his joys are great. Consider the mysterious suffering of Gethsemane, when the soul of the Redeemer was rent with anguish, and his forehead was bathed with a bloody sweat. Men draw near to the garden, with reverent feet, to inquire into the nature of that wonderful agony. "Why did such anguish burden the Saviour's heart?" is the unanswered question that bursts from the lips of Christendom. The precise character of his agony we do not now attempt to explain; but its greatness came from the greatness of his nature. When the Christ suffered, his agony was in proportion to his divinity. In the garden at the foot of Olivet is the divine illustration, and proof, of the principle which we have affirmed.

What a profound meaning there is in every form of human suffering! What revelations of greatness in the experiences which have often been cited as proofs of

weakness ! What meaning there is in that eternal discontent, which, like the ever restless sea, murmurs in the heart of the world ! The idea of something purer, brighter than every present reality, an idea that floats down from heaven, overshadows life, and causes its best things to seem unsatisfactory. A soul that was made to have fellowship with God must be a sojourner and a stranger till it reach its home before his throne. It is sad to see man attempt to feed this infinite mind upon finite and perishing things. But it is glorious to see how its divine hunger reappears after each experiment has been fully tried, and to behold its eternal longing for the bread of life. That is a glorious discontent which will never let the spirit rest in its sins. And the other manifestation of the same tendency is equally glorious in pure lives ; in the desire for a still nobler excellence, which shames all present attainments however great. This exposure to discontent and suffering is not the dark thread in our existence. It is the prophecy, and hope, of glory. It is the divine call to the bosom of the Father. Every pain which it brings is to give a more perfect healing ; and its grand result is to make us sons of God.

A great truth, then, is involved in the singular declaration in the text. We repeat, that the brute never suffers as man suffers. The words bereavement, remorse, have little meaning when applied to beings that are so low. In proportion as we are exalted above them in capacity, our pains, and our joys, are greater than theirs. We often shrink from the trials of life. They seem to darken the world which is otherwise so radiant with the manifestations of infinite love. But

would we really have them stricken out of this universe which God has made? Even in the midst of its sorrow would the heart be willing to have parted with its power to love, to have lost the capacity of affection itself, the chief joy of the world, because the joy may have been changed to anguish? Would it purchase a release from pain by the terrible price of the soul's annihilation? Men long for bright views of the world and of life. The brightest views include the pains which afflict us; the sharp struggles for truth or right, with the anguish of the cross which faithful men have borne, or must bear, for its sake; the trial of sorrowing hearts and desolate homes. Man was made for something far nobler than unmixed enjoyment. When I see the brave souls who are loyal to truth and God amidst shame and loss, ready to sacrifice houses, lands, honor, love, for Christ's dear sake, — when I see the flames curl up around the brave confessor's quivering flesh, pity is quickly changed to admiration. The idea of their suffering is lost in the manifestation of their glory. I know that the crown was purchased by precious blood. But I cannot weep for him who has been found worthy to wear it upon his brow. Or when I see a man who has borne the cross amid the bereavements of life, but who looks up in a growing trust through every sorrow, with a deepening serenity spreading over the anguished features, with an ever-clearer vision of the heavenly society as the earth grows lonely, — the beauty and the glory of that trust almost forbid me to grieve for the pains by which it was made so deep, and so triumphant. These grand attainments, with their divine joy, are immeasurably better than that freedom from the discipline

of pain for which man inconsiderately prays. Man was created to aspire to these divine ends. Even the words which express the noblest qualities, the traits of character that constitute the glory of earth and of heaven, suggest the idea of trial. Meekness, patience, forgiveness, heroism, trust,—they are all words of victory. They imply the struggle and the battle, while they speak of triumph. They imply the bearing of the cross in a thousand forms, in contests against the world, or in the silent suffering of the soul.

“He that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.” The sorrow is incidental to the soul’s greatness. Two truths are disclosed in the views which the text suggests. One is, that man does not need knowledge so much as faith. A condition of things must exist, in the partial veiling of the purposes of God, which compels us to find our only refuge in the spirit of trust. The problems of this world and of life will not fully disclose themselves to our most thorough search. He that speculates upon them with a determination not to be satisfied until they are made plain, will meet repeated disappointment at every step. He that increaseth knowledge in that sense, inevitably increases sorrow. In his utmost attainments, he cannot escape the limitations that are implied in the condition of trust; and each vain attempt will create a new experience of pain. We are not gods, that we should know,—but men, that we should believe.

Yet while we are imprisoned in this limitation of our knowledge, if we choose to term it so, we see that the sorrow which it occasions, reveals the greatness of our nature. This is the second truth which the text sug-

gests. We need no other truth to brighten every conception of the world, and of human life. This causes the bow to be set in every cloud. If grief be severe and deep, the capacity of the soul to feel and to love must be great. And the depth of life's heavier trials not only implies the greatness of the soul's capacity, but prophesies the noblest spiritual development. Man indeed is permitted partially to see that spiritual development in the fidelity of self-denying disciples ; in the serene trust of those who have been led through suffering into peace. We forget the trial and the suffering, when we look upon this spiritual greatness. We count the temptation and the loss to have been joy, when we behold their present issues, as they gladden, and glorify, the world. What are these results but indications and prophecies of serener, brighter issues in higher scenes ? Then sorrow shall be seen not only to indicate the capacity of the soul, but to prepare it for a crown of glory and of honor.

We draw these cheering and divine doctrines from the lamentation of a sceptic of remote antiquity. But we come to conclusions in perfect harmony with the Christian teaching, and the life of Jesus. Through suffering, and from the cross, Jesus passed into the heavens. We linger in tenderest sympathy among the incidents of the tragedy that closed his life. The mockings and revilings, the cruel scourge, the crown of thorns, draw tears from all generations of disciples. But we forget his suffering in the triumph of his patience. We feel that we are not looking upon a scene of sorrow, but of victory. We do not see the agony of humanity, but the serenity of divinity. Who would not gladly bear

his cross, if he could gain his perfect victory too? Earth's darkest scene of suffering is filled with divine light. So shall light beam from every experience of anguish, when its work is accomplished. And then toil and grief shall only be remembered as the stepping-stones in our way to the world of joy.

NOVEMBER 2, 1851.

II.

CONFLICTING VIEWS OF PROVIDENCE.

THE SON OF MAN INDEED GOETH AS IT IS WRITTEN OF HIM: BUT
WOE TO THAT MAN BY WHOM THE SON OF MAN IS BETRAYED !
GOOD WERE IT FOR THAT MAN IF HE HAD NEVER BEEN BORN.
— Mark, xiv. 21.

THESE words suggest one of the deepest mysteries. The Son of Man went, as it was written, predetermined that he should go. Through the basest treachery he was brought to that cross which became his everlasting glory. Yet the instrument to accomplish this designed result, the traitor who was needed to bring Jesus to his crown, incurred a damning guilt. Explain this mystery, man exclaims in bewildered thought. Show how the necessary agent to develop the purposes of God can be accursed in his guilt, accursed in his woe.

I dare not attempt to explain it. No reasoning can explain it. Could we look down upon this mysterious Providence from the throne of God, we should not need to reason. Then we should doubtless see all these conflicting views resolved into harmony. We have the only present explanation of such mysteries in the first

impulse of our feeling. Reason as we may, we still recoil in horror from the treachery of Judas. We cannot banish the conviction, that his treason was as base as Christ's cross is glorious. This is clear. And yet we see that this sin of sins was the agency through which Calvary became the mount of human hope. Without the traitor, how could Jesus have been brought to his most shameful, yet most dear and ever-blessed cross.

We refer to this great tragedy in the records of the world, because it illustrates the position in which we are continually placed. We are attracted by apparently opposing thoughts in almost all our views of truth, of Providence, and of life. There are two views of every thing that is worthy of consideration by the human mind. There are two sides to every truth and to every fact. We may be unable to reconcile them, yet they still exist. We may be perplexed by their apparent contradiction,—still they may be alike, and equally true. And the part of the wise man is to hold a broad and comprehensive faith, which includes such conflicting views, and brings them, as far as possible, into harmony; and when that cannot be gained, he is to bow in meek, trusting adoration, and wait for the higher vision which will discover the secret of their reconciliation. Let us consider a few examples of these conflicting thoughts, as we take a wide view of Providence, or observe the development of individual souls,—as we meditate upon the changes of life, or upon the greater change of death,—and then glance at the lesson of lowliness which such reflections enforce.

What conflicting views are suggested, in the first

place, when we reflect upon the moral aspects of the world, and the movements of Providence in the development of the race! Very near to every great truth and to every great virtue, there lies an appalling error. It is easy to slide from the noblest views and the highest qualities of character, into gross mistakes and perversities. In order to attain a grand principle, or a great virtue, it sometimes seems as if it were necessary to toil up a rugged steep whose top overhangs an unfathomable abyss. When man goes one step too far in an unbalanced view of truth, or an unbalanced quality of character, he falls into bewildering darkness. Two opposite errors may arise in all deep meditations upon Providence; and it is rare to find a mind which entirely escapes from both. The man who is filled with purposes of love, which make him alive to the wrongs and sins of the world, may fix his eyes almost exclusively upon the dark and guilty institutions which cover the past and the present with gloom. He sees how they have stood, and still stand, in the way of human progress, and apparently defeat the purposes of God. He sees how Jesus is crucified anew in every age, in perpetual violations of his law, and humanity is left to pray for the coming of a Redeemer who never appears to come. By the sensibility to human suffering and sin, which brings him into fellowship with the love of Jesus, he may be tempted into an impatience which will create bitterness or despair. When he surveys the sensualities and oppressions of the world, the woes and sins whose "worm dieth not" and whose fires are never quenched, a thick darkness seems to spread itself over the earth, and to veil the heavens. He does not then

see the serene Providence which always carries forward its bright and beautiful designs. Clouds and darkness are round about the throne. Through the very earnestness of his love, a practical scepticism may arise, which does not lead him to utter unbelieving words, perhaps, but which is manifested every hour in his impatience or despair; and he practically distrusts God, and denounces the blind and sinning world. All calm and serene confidence, all bright and sustaining hope dies within his heart. See how an unbalanced view of truth, which leads the mind one step beyond the summit, carries it into the realm of night.

Consider now the opposite mistake. Another man ascends to broader views of the Eternal Providence, and perceives how surely it carries forward its great designs. He sees that even the wrath of man is overruled to promote the praise of God. Neither Herod nor Judas can defeat the Father's purpose of mercy; but they become instruments in its accomplishment, as truly as Peter and Paul. He looks upon human history, and sees that the men who only seemed to defile and desolate the world, introduced revolutions which eventually aided the progress of the race. Here is a sublime confidence, when restrained within its proper limits. But when it goes one step too far, it becomes a kind of fatalism which tends to confound moral distinctions, since all things may be alike overruled for good. How that fatalism is sometimes baptized by the name of trust! What men call trust in God sometimes degenerates into a feeling which checks and paralyzes all intense devotion to truth and right, in the struggle against the world's iniquities. We may detect the pres-

ence of this fatalism every day. Why toil so hard, it prompts man to say, against the oppressions or strifes of the world? Who can say that they may not become the very agencies to extend the dominion of freedom and peace? And thus man often permits high-handed wickedness to go on, and call its wishes and its purposes its destiny,—the part which it was designed to perform in this inscrutable Providence. With what ingenious fallacies grasping monarchs and ambitious nations cheat themselves into the delusion that God designed to give them growing power and widening dominion! An unbalanced trust in Providence may produce the fatalism which neglects to toil for truth and righteousness, because God rules over all, and which smites all fervent martyr zeal with a fatal frost, or it may be perverted into a cover for ambitious and base designs.

Who can harmonize these two views in feeling and in action? Who can toil with the martyr's zeal, and still believe that defeat or victory may alike redound to the glory of God? Who can possess a burning zeal which shall never consume his patience, united with a calm trust which shall never diminish zeal? Who can work as if the evil defeated the providence of God, and yet believe that if the evil seem to triumph, Providence will still accomplish its purpose? A comprehensive mind will never limit itself to one of these views alone, but will strive to hold a just balance between the two. Amidst its toils for truth, it will repose in perfect trust. Thou Son of God! we can only look to Thee in our attempts to gain the truest life. Thou didst live and die only to rescue man from sin; and yet, amidst the struggle, Thou didst rest in a trust as serene as the

peace of God. When shall we learn to unite Thy holy fire with Thy godlike patience?

The same tendencies towards a sceptical despair, or an idle fatalism, may be occasionally detected in the feeling with which the sins of individuals are regarded. What hope can there be for the sinner? some exclaim, when they see him plunge deeper and deeper into worldliness and guilt; — hardening habits into adamantine chains, and heaping a mountain load of transgressions upon his soul. Or if those adamantine chains of sinful habit can be broken, how can peace ever enter the heart that must be filled and tortured by eternal memories of guilt? It would have been good for such a soul if it had never been born. But soon another view appears. Just when the prodigal's guilt and shame were greatest, he came to himself. Perhaps the full development of the evil may be transformed into the agency to save. The sense of guilt has tortured the wanderer into penitence, until his tears have made the crimsoned soul white as snow. And just here, again, a fatalism sometimes creeps in to say, "Let men follow their impulses, for their bitter results will become their cure." Some even imagine that guilt, with its remorse, may only be another way to the same heaven. Or if we shrink from that daring thought, the feeling often arises which allows the reckless, wicked man to go on if he will, because experience may be the best teacher for his wayward heart. How many moral pleadings have been thus discouraged and silenced, which might have turned the trembling scale in a favoring hour, and checked the sinner in his mad career! The most licentious doctrines which men can adopt have sometimes

concealed themselves beneath the disguise of a seeming adoration of the Father's love. How can we avoid these mistakes on either side? How can we learn never to despair of the greatest sinner, and yet never to think lightly of the sin, because its enormity may crush the heart into penitence? What a grand attainment is a balanced thought! Obey the first impulse of abhorrence for the sin, as you look upon man's degradations and crimes, for that impulse is true. Plead with the sinner as if his transgressions closed every door of hope. It may be, as far as we dare to say, it may be that they will drive the soul eternally from God. Yet believe, every moment, and give thanks for that glorious hope — believe that the guilt which you deplore and abhor may bring the prodigal to himself, and thus lead him back, at last, to his Father's house.

It would be easy to illustrate these tendencies to contradictory views by reference to other examples. But we confine ourselves to the different aspects which Providence may, and often must, assume. And we turn, next, to an entirely different form of human experience. Observe this great ministry of sorrow through the bereavements which none can escape, and see how the heart must there also be swayed by apparently conflicting thoughts.

There is a position beneath, and there is a position above every cloud; and how entirely different is the aspect of all human trial, as we look at it from one position or the other. Standing here, in life, it is grief, — bitter anguish. Standing there, above our present life, it is wise instruction, needful chastisement. Standing here, it may seem an unbroken gloom. Standing there,

serene issues appear under this benignant Providence. When we are in the garden of trial and behold the departure of the loved, we must pray, "Let the cup pass away." Could we look down from heaven at the same moment, we might accept it as the cup of blessing. And strange as the demand may appear, we are called to occupy both of these positions. We must stand in the position of a sufferer by the necessity of our nature. It is one element of all trial, that its precise issue should be unseen. Were the veil withdrawn which hides the unimagined glories of the unseen world, were we now to hear the choral harps and witness the joy of those who have ascended in lowly trust, few tears would flow for human bereavement. It would be as if we were also there where they weep no more. But we must walk in darkness and experience all its gloom. It is designed that we should by the very fact that we are not permitted to see. Does any man say that this is to demand contradictions? It is only the recognition of the conflicting feelings which must arise in the deeper discipline of life. Some affirm that we should strive to soar into a transport of feeling which will raise us above our grief. That is unnatural. It is a sin against this human heart whose affections are inspired by the love of God. But it is also a sin to lose the peace of a divine faith and trust. We are to stand on this side of the grave when we are led to its brink, and realize our loneliness. We are to pass around and beyond it, at the same moment, and look on the side of immortality too. Drink the cup of sorrow, even to its utmost drop. That is our appointed discipline. We must realize its bitterness in order that it may become our

blessing. But let us still believe that the trial is a blessing even when we drain its bitterest draught.

And the same apparent contradictions must be felt respecting the law of death which brings these bereavements. Nothing can suggest more entirely conflicting thoughts. Man has clothed death in the deepest gloom. Humanity has shuddered before it as “the King of Terrors.” Yet, in another view, death is only an entrance into life. While we weep when friends depart, as if the change were really *death*, just beyond the veil angelic spirits are welcoming them to a higher birth, with a deeper joy than ever thrills the mother’s heart when the voice of the child is first heard in its earthly home. What a contradiction is here ! Yet both views must be mingled in the true thought. The gloomy view of death has been sadly exaggerated. Still it has a foundation in the aspect which such a change must wear when it is viewed from our present life. Brightly as we desire to regard it, earnestly as man may sometimes wish for it to come, still we cannot sympathize with a feeling which fails to look upon it with solemn awe. It is a great thing to leave all that is familiar and dear. This thought alone is anguish in some positions in life. But to enter we know not what, to leave this speaking form and feature, through which the soul has hitherto been seen, mouldering into ashes, and to pass into a mode of existence so entirely diverse from this that neither faith nor imagination can form a picture of its scenes,—is not this enough to awaken awe ? And when we add the remembrance of the strict judgments of the spiritual world which conscience predicts, where we shall escape from the delusions which now prevent

our clear perception of eternal truths, or hide the guilt of so many sins, where we must stand before an unerring tribunal and a heart-searching Judge, — I confess that I distrust the men who do not think of such a change with the profoundest awe. I fear that they have not gained that lowliness which is the only garment of acceptance before the Eternal Throne. And yet the Christian view of death, expressed in the apostle's triumphant exclamation, — "O grave! where is thy victory? O death! where is thy sting?" — this is never to be forgotten for a moment. How can we describe the mingled feelings with which we should regard this great change of death, or obey its summons? Not in bold confidence is frail and sinful man to go, yet not in distrust; not in exultation, yet not in despair; but in a profound submission which hushes the excitements of expectation or of fear, — which feels that man knows nothing, and, therefore, must trust every thing, and lays itself low in the hand of God while life ebbs away, to say, — "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."

For the sake of greater unity we have confined ourselves to the conflicting views of Providence and life which careful thought or deep experience suggests. But similar statements may be made respecting almost every truth. What is a true character except a combination of apparently opposite qualities, — in which charity never degenerates into weak lenity, and strictness never hardens into severity; in which prudence never chills the fresh impulses of the heart, and impulsiveness never sins against prudence; in which independence never forgets humility, and humility never diminishes independence; in which the wisdom of the

serpent is blended with the guilelessness of the dove ! What a balance of conflicting qualities must be maintained to make the character complete ! And what is an enlightened faith but a union of apparently opposite truths ? It believes, for example, that God carries forward his Providence by uniform laws, and yet that He is sovereign over those laws ; free to interpose, according to his sovereign love, to answer his children's prayer. It believes in the presence of the Spirit in the secrecy of every soul, swaying its affections and its will, yet supposes that we are still free to choose, free to resist the Spirit's pleadings, or to yield an implicit obedience. It believes in man's entire dependence and in his perfect freedom too. What apparently conflicting truths every wise man is constrained to recognize in respect to the least and the greatest things in the movements of Providence, in the universe of God !

Consider the grand lesson which such meditations enforce. They teach us to bow in unquestioning adoration before an incomprehensible Providence, and an incomprehensible Father. There are those who speak as if they had fathomed the great deep of the Divine government, and penetrated its awful mysteries. Their system of thought elucidates the whole. There are others who refuse to believe any thing until every aspect of the truth can be explained. Let a difficulty remain unsolved and they turn away. They ask, in effect, that God should explain himself to them before they will trust in his truth, or receive the light that he vouchsafes to impart. Thou child, whosoever thou art, who hast fallen into either of these assumptions ! Thou *child* indeed ! Childhood believes and trusts.

What word can describe such folly? Thou hast lost thy childlike simplicity, but thou hast not gained a matured wisdom. The theory of our existence leaves us in partial darkness. A life of discipline must be a state of mingled light and shade. We must accept many truths which we cannot reconcile. We are beneath Providence, not above it. We must work on as if man's wickedness defeated the purposes of God. Yet we must live in an unchanging conviction that even wickedness shall be overruled to promote the triumph of the same eternal purpose. We cannot but shrink from suffering. Yet we must accept it in meek acquiescence. We must stand in solemn awe when we hear the coming steps of Death. Yet we must willingly obey his summons, and take his hand as the hand of an angel. We are left amidst mysteries many and great. Life and death are equally mysterious. But these mysteries must not disturb our faith, and we must calmly wait for the hour in which they shall all be solved in the world of light. Here, in our present life, we are like the man who walks beneath the evening sky, when bright stars are beaming over him to tell of a higher world, and to reveal his path. But, although they pour light upon his present way, they shine in unbroken silence, and answer none of his questions concerning the world of which they speak. Or we are like the child led through thick darkness by a parent's hand. Though we see him not we can feel the Father's hand, and its touch inspires new confidence within the soul. Let the spirit of lowliness fill our hearts which give thanks for every ray of light, and believes, and trusts, where it cannot see.

JANUARY 23, 1848.

III.

GETHISEMANE.



THEN SAITH HE UNTO THEM, MY SOUL IS EXCEEDING SORROWFUL, EVEN UNTO DEATH : TARRY YE HERE, AND WATCH WITH ME. — RISE, LET US BE GOING : BEHOLD, HE IS AT HAND THAT DOTHT BETRAY ME. — Matt. xxvi. 38, 46.

It may seem presumptuous to present an interpretation of the agony of Jesus. Many believers have deemed it peculiarly difficult of explanation. Yet no scene in his history is more replete with instruction. We shrink, indeed, from the attempt to develop its teaching. But we do not hesitate in consequence of the conflicting interpretations which have been advanced. We shrink from the attempt to analyze such intense emotion. All words seem shallow when the feeling is unfathomably deep. It seems more appropriate to go to the garden with silent, adoring sympathy and reverence, rather than with words of criticism. While we watch with the Redeemer in his agony, as when we stand before the truly grand, the sublimely beautiful in nature, all speech is hushed. Before the outward manifesta-

tions of God's power, or the deepest things in the human heart, the first impulse is to be still.

In the disconnected sentences which have been selected as the text, Jesus is presented in two points of view. In the one we hear his cry of anguish in the hour of agony. In the other, his calm words when he meets the betrayer. We join these two expressions together for a twofold reason. The connection between them is natural and direct. And we desire that those who are perplexed by the agony should also remember the sublime peace that succeeded it. Mark the contrast in the two successive scenes. One is all anguish. The other is all serenity. Just now great drops of blood were wrung out upon the forehead of Jesus by the intensity of his emotion. In the next hour he meets the traitor with a calm remonstrance, with no trace of that awful anguish upon his brow. The agonized man is transfigured by a superhuman serenity. The angel that descended to strengthen him in the garden remains in his heart. When he utters the simple words, "I am he," even the rude soldiery fall backward, awed, overpowered, by the majestic calmness of his presence. Whatever the agony may have been, it has departed now. If it were a transient eclipse, the darkness has quickly vanished. Perhaps it unsealed the deeper fountains of strength. Through the pains of the human heart the godlike may have been fully born.

But what was this agony? Can we discover the nature, or the elements, of that profound experience in Gethsemane? It is necessary to undertake the less attractive work of exposition before we consider the view which the scene suggests concerning the character

of Jesus. This exposition furnishes the authority, and basis, for the thought which seems so rich in instructions, and so full of attractions.

Three things combined, perhaps, to produce this anguish in the soul of Jesus. There was, in the first place, the trial of the deepest human love. We believe that this formed a part of that great agony. The heart of Jesus overflowed with human love. His relation to John, to Mary and Martha, his tears at the tomb of Lazarus, his last words to his mother, while he hung upon the cross, are all proofs of the strength of his sympathy and affection. And when we look at the scene in the garden, in connection with what immediately preceded it, we know that every sensibility must have been most deeply moved. We see the manifestations of his deep feeling in the first reference to this last journey to Jerusalem. We are told that the disciples "were afraid," as they followed him. He knew that he was going to his cross. And the rapt devotion of his spirit covered his form and features with a divine majesty, which filled the disciples with trembling reverence and awe. His answer when his feet were anointed, indicates the same intensity of feeling. His mind was absorbed with one thought; and the fragrance of the ointment spoke only of his embalming. Every thing conspired to deepen his emotion. He entered Jerusalem amidst hosannas, and in apparent triumph. But the nature of that popular enthusiasm, based upon a false view of his character, only proved to him how readily the same people would join in the cry for his crucifixion. He went into Gethsemane from the last supper with his disciples, where his heart had poured

itself out with unspeakable fervor and sweetness, in the interchange of deep affection. The disciples were exhausted by this intense excitement; and when they went into the garden they were overcome with sleep. But the soul of Jesus was aroused to an immortal wakefulness by the concentrated emotions of that hour. And could another element be added to the cup which seemed already full? He stood in utter loneliness in respect to human sympathy. His chosen friends were slumbering. How impressively that circumstance imaged the fact that the whole world was sleeping over that which awakened him to agony! And, as some have supposed, might not the night itself, which makes loneliness more lonely, which symbolizes so solemnly the fact, that no light of this world's sympathy beams over the heart, — might not the night have added another element of sadness? When we remember all these circumstances, we know that if there was a human heart in the breast of Jesus, its profoundest deeps must then have been broken up.

But there was an additional cause for his anguish! He foresaw the fate which his country was destined to meet. His patriotism was keenly tried. The tears which fell over Jerusalem, when he entered the city amidst hosannas, prove the strength of his patriotic feeling. It was revealed again in his reply to the women who wailed over him as he went to the cross: "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." This was no light or trivial sorrow. Jesus was patriotic, as well as divinely philanthropic. Although his heart bled for the Samaritan as well as for the Jew, he felt an added pang when he beheld the

blindness of his countrymen, and foresaw the suffering which must come upon his kinsmen in the flesh. And he foresaw it all. In their bitter fierceness he saw the spirit which would take up arms against the Roman, and incur his awful vengeance. Was not this one element of his agony? Did not this furnish one impulse to the prayer that the cup might pass from his lips? How joyfully would he have been crucified with malefactors for the deliverance of his countrymen! But the spirit which carried him to the cross, was the spirit which must seal their doom. And as he looked down through the ages with prophetic sight, with a pained and bleeding heart, he saw the dread fulfilment of their self-uttered curse: "His blood be upon ourselves, and upon our children."

But there was another element of agony which was greater than all. He felt a *Saviour's* anguish. Grief for the sin that led him to the cross, brought the keenest suffering. Sorrow pierced his soul, when he remembered that men would not hear the calls of love which sought to gather them together as the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and that the ministry of judgment would become the only possible ministry of mercy. Sorrow for the sin! This prompted the awful exclamation concerning the treachery of his betrayer;—"It had been good for that man if he had never been born." And when he recalled the blindness which had always stoned the prophets, when he beheld the spirit which was ready to crucify its Redeemer, when he looked forward to a similar blindness and sin, in future generations, this divine sorrow

wrung out the bloody sweat and the cry of agony. The Saviour bled for the sin of man before he hung upon the tree. In the loneliness of Gethsemane, grief for man's iniquity laid a crushing burden upon his heart. Perhaps that burden was even heavier at Gethsemane than at Calvary. When he went to the cross itself, the glory of that great sacrifice, visions of the redemption which it would bring to the race, may have changed the torturing anguish into peace.

And now it may be said, "These were doubtless elements of the Redeemer's agony;" but why should he have experienced such awful anguish? Men often contrast the agony of Jesus with the firmness of martyr-souls, and wonder how the apparent weakness can be explained. Such questionings imply a misapprehension of the real nature of true Christian feeling. Let us consider the difficulty which has presented itself to many minds. A grand view of Christianity will thus be disclosed, which has manifold and most important applications.

Men have a vague impression that Christianity not only regulates, but in some degree represses, our natural sympathies. They imagine that it aids us in days of trial, by teaching us not to cling so closely to those around us; that it saves us from the anguish of broken friendships, by lifting us above earthly affections; that it inculcates an impersonal feeling which knows no peculiar glow, and can feel no peculiar pang. They are unable to reconcile its impartial philanthropy with special human affections. Hence, some objectors, and some mistaken advocates also, insist that Christianity

condemns patriotism by inculcating universal aims. Hence arise many kindred fancies which obscure the true glory of the Redeemer's spirit.

This is all misapprehension. Christianity never represses, but intensates and glorifies humanity. It never closes, but widens, and immeasurably deepens the channels for all noble human feelings. It never extinguishes, but fires the human heart. It gives to every pure sympathy an inexpressible strength. The new power which it imparts to the heart flows throughout the frame, and appears in every throbbing of the pulse. It gives a deeper expression to the parent's eye, and lights it with an immortal love. It transforms even the mere civilities of life into beautiful and natural manifestations of feeling. Christianity creates a life which is gloriously described in the phrase, — "God manifest in the flesh." Such a life endows earthly sympathies with a godlike energy. The true disciple is all nerve and heart. A more than feminine tenderness entwines itself around his manly soul. Every trace of stoicism is erased from his heart. His firm spirit is not like a bare sturdy pillar, standing up in severe strength. The column must be so entwined from base to summit with the gentlest tendrils of feeling, that you do not at first perceive their firm support. Yet when these are rent and torn away, it is revealed in its majestic strength. Thus stands the Christian soul when the sympathies which some imagine can only weaken it, are torn away or crucified. Christianity is human as well as divine. The depth of its humanity is in proportion to the majesty of its divinity. It does not sustain us by crushing our affections. It brings

angels to strengthen us in our agony. The apostolic declaration, "Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," is not to be applied to external things alone. It is verified even in outward things, in the universal, and all beneficent influence of the religious spirit. But its best verification appears in the power of religion to deepen every true feeling which pertains to the present world; to give new strength to sympathy and new depth to love; to impart to the countenance, not only the glow of human feeling, but also the radiance of that higher inspiration with which it quickens, and glorifies, all present friendships. The divine life which will be perfected in the world to come, transfigures humanity in every sphere of present existence. Has it not, therefore, the promise of the life which now is?

The sacrifices which the Christian heart is required to make cannot be what some have imagined. Some have compared the agony of Jesus with the stoicism of the philosopher, and questioned the Saviour's preëminence. Stoicism is grand. But it has no heart. It possesses only a barbarian grandeur. We cannot admire the firmness which is built upon the ruins of what is tenderest and sweetest in the human breast. The grim resolve of the savage is not half so majestic as the tearful, yet unreserved, consecration of the refined and sensitive man. Others have contrasted the agony of Jesus with the manifestations of enthusiasm. The fervor of enthusiasm is grand. But in its wildness it often tramples upon the heart. It creates an insane greatness. It forgets or overlooks the great facts of life. Let such poor comparisons cease. Christianity

has no sympathy with a barbaric sternness, or a visionary fervor. Its spirit is as much more beautiful than these manifestations of so-called greatness, as the angelic heart, with its thousand strings of feeling attuned to sweetest harmony, is more beautiful than an icy stoicism. It is as much more grand than these, as the calm expression of a cultivated and inspired reason is more grand than the insane majesty of a wild enthusiasm.

Do we still ask, why should Jesus have known his agony? Do we wonder still? It was in exact harmony with his character. It arose from the peculiar intensity which his divine life gave to the human heart. It was the result of the profound development of human affection in his breast. Why regard it as inexplicable, in the history of such a life? Why look upon it as a mysterious manifestation of the spirit of Jesus? We must stand in amazement, indeed, when we consider the depth of that experience. To our unappreciating souls, the agony of Jesus, like his whole life, is veiled in mystery. But there is no mystery in the nature of that agony. Do not look upon it as if it betrayed his imperfection! Do not question whether the suffering of Jesus in the garden can be vindicated! His anguish came from the greatness, not from the weakness of his nature. If his heart had not been so intensely loving, if his affections and sensibilities had not attained such divine strength, he could not have suffered thus. The trial was unutterably severe, because his love was unutterably divine. It does not become men, who cannot comprehend what it is truly to love, who are not great enough to appreciate the Redeemer's sympathy, or to

be capable of such agony, to go to Gethsemane to criticise. How can they appreciate the pangs which wrung the heart of the Son of God? Could we conceive of lower tribes of being as speculating concerning the sorrows of men, we might as fitly imagine them to wonder at the pains of which man alone is capable, and to question his greatness, because, unlike themselves, he is sometimes overpowered by grief. Instead of bringing Jesus down from his throne, Gethsemane seems to place the crown upon his brow. His agony makes his sacrifice more glorious. He manifested no stoicism. He was immeasurably greater than that. He displayed no vehement enthusiasm. He saw all things as they were. He was not borne on by human sympathy, as so many martyrs have been; by the sympathy of the few, at least, whose approval was more to them than the condemnation of the world. Jesus stood alone. He went to the cross with every nerve alive and bleeding. The ideal of greatness which many cherish, seems to me unworthy and imperfect. To adore while we bleed and suffer, is true glory. To wear the crown of thorns, and feel its every cruel point, and yet retain a radiant brow,—to climb the hill of sacrifice, and chant praises to the Father with lips and heart, where each word of praise is a dirge over every selfish hope,—is genuine greatness. Then the human heart is enrobed with a divine majesty.

Gethsemane is a clear testimony to the depth of the Redeemer's heart; a manifestation of a most attractive feature in the Christian life. It gives instructions of unspeakable importance to the soul. Jesus would not have been the true example for man, if he had not suf-

fered. Some minds shrink from such an assertion. Yet who has not been called, or will not be called, to meet a similar experience? We are made for both smiles and tears. The smiles come most frequently. Yet the tears must sometimes gush from our eyes. The heart cannot know its rapturous joys without the liability to sorrows equally keen. If we are thus alive to gladness, we must be also alive to grief. God's angels have various ministries. Some come with the bounding feet of joy; some with the veiled face of sadness. Nature and Providence symbolize this great fact. Nature has its sunshine and its clouds; its serene and its stormy skies. But the clouds bring refreshments to the earth. They drop down the rains and the dews. Life repeats what such analogies suggest. The countenance of man must be furrowed by tears as well as wreathed in smiles. There are some spiritual energies which no ministry but that of sorrow can develop. There are some feelings which no other experience can unseal. Have you not felt this when you listened to the words of those who had really suffered? Did they not come from a deeper spirit than is possessed by those who float upon the surface of life? Did they not touch deeper chords in the soul than any other words can reach? Did you not then begin to perceive the profound meaning of the words, "Blessed are they that mourn?" Blessed are they, indeed, not only in future consolations, but in an enlarged and a profounder life.

Man needs the lesson of Gethsemane. He needs to see a spirit that can teach him to triumph through his suffering. When he looks into that evening stillness upon Gethsemane and Olivet, which was only broken

by the prayer of agony and of trust, he knows that the depths of trial have once been fully sounded. He finds the Redeemer whom he needs. He sees another proof of the Messiahship of Jesus, that he can meet the heart in every phase of its experience ; in its keenest agony, and in its hour of deepest peace. Joy to the world for the agony of Jesus, as well as for every other incident in his divinely glorious life. How needful are its instructions to often suffering man, and how blessed !

OCTOBER 20, 1844.

IV.

JESUS REFUSING THE WINE AND MYRRH.

THEY GAVE HIM TO DRINK WINE MINGLED WITH MYRRH ; BUT
HE RECEIVED IT NOT. — Mark xv. 23.

WE are told that it was customary to administer a stupefying draught to those who were suffering the agony of crucifixion. So terrible was that form of punishment, that even the men who inflicted it were melted into compassion as they witnessed its tortures. Cruelty itself shuddered at the thought of such intolerable pain, and endeavored to give a partial relief. And although the unfeeling populace and the merciless priests mocked the uncomplaining sufferer, as if they sought to make *crucifixion* more excruciating, yet some compassionate hearts were moved to pity. Perhaps some heathen soldier was touched by a tenderness which the Jew could not feel, and offered this alleviating draught to Jesus. “But he received it not.”

He received it not. Last night, the meek sufferer prayed, in Gethsemane, that, if it were possible, the cup

might pass from him. Last night he prayed in an agony so intense, that "he sweat as it were great drops of blood." Yet, now, upon the cross itself, racked by its torture, he refuses every alleviation of its pains. The incident recorded in the text derives new significance from its close connection with that hour of agony. We follow Jesus to the garden to hear him exclaim, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Three times he falls upon the ground in the intensest pleading of his soul in prayer. Again, and yet again, he turns to the three disciples, asking them to watch with him a single hour. He seems to call upon heaven and earth for sympathy and strength. His spirit seems to fail in the moment of its extremest need. We almost fear that the trial of the morrow may not be bravely met. Yet, when the morrow comes, he refuses "the wine and the myrrh." Last night his soul was like the agitated sea, when the sun goes down amidst tumult and storm. Now, all is serene, as when the morning smiles again upon the calmed and placid wave. The heavens could not look down more peacefully upon Jerusalem, than Jesus looked upon the instrument of his torture. Even nature seemed to sympathize with that cruel sacrifice, and veiled her face in gloom. But Jesus refused the wine and the myrrh. We do not apprehend the full meaning of the text, unless we consider it in connection with the agony in the garden. It was neither apathy, nor a delirious enthusiasm, insensible to the keenness of the trial, which refused every alleviation of its pains. Gethsemane forbids either supposition. Each distinct and separate pain, whether from the suffering of the body, or the scorn of foes, or the deser-

tion of friends, or the divine grief that wept over the blindness of his crucifiers, he clearly perceived, and keenly felt. Jesus felt each separate pulse of agony; yet he retained the serenity of a God.

Like every minutest thing in the Redeemer's life, the incident recorded in the text is connected with the sublimest principle. For each word or look of Jesus is like each single ray of light that falls upon our path. If we follow it back to its source, it leads us to a glory which is almost too bright for mortal eyes to behold. Let us observe, therefore, the application of the text to human experience, and endeavor to form some conception of the spirit which it indicates and reveals.

Jesus stood by the cross, or hung upon its piercing nails, with a keener sensibility to the trials of the scene than our imagination can conceive. Yet he refused the wine and the myrrh. *We* shrink from bearing the full weight of any cross which Providence may place upon our shoulder. Jesus bravely met and serenely bore the heaviest burden. *We* seek escape instead of victory. Who stands by his cross and desires no deliverance from its sternest self-renunciations? Do our worldly aims meet with disappointment? and does God thus invite to a crucifixion of worldly hopes which can place us above the power of external change? Do the enchantments of the world, in which we have hitherto believed, prove false? To whom do we turn again but to the same magician, though his words are seen to be a lie, that he may weave another spell to beguile us of our sorrows? The delusive hopes were like bubbles floating in the sunbeam, that vanished into nothing when we sought to grasp them. Yet, instantly,

by some new excitement, equally baseless, we seek to expel the remembrance of the old. How few are those royal souls who calmly rest among the ruins, when the temple of their worldly hope falls around them, desiring no false solace to divert their thought, refusing to build again upon vain foundations! How few reject all superficial consolations, and go down instantly and resolutely into the deeper affections of the heart, — to that well whose waters spring up into everlasting life! What draught do we not eagerly accept to bewilder our senses, to charm away bitter remembrances, to intoxicate for the whole of life, if that were possible, rather than nobly strive for this absolute triumph! What oblivions we seek in the lapse of time, what diversion of mind in new excitements, rather than wrestle with those trials in the wilderness until they are put to flight forever.

Such reflections suggest the question whether there has been much of *true* self-renunciation, even where Providence has most graciously invited it by placing needful crosses in the paths of men. Experience often forces upon us that unwelcome question. Why does a second visitation of calamity ever reproduce the overwhelming sorrow of a first grief? Was it not change, rather than triumph, which calmed the heart? Was it not the opiate of time, or the intoxication of new hopes, rather than the serene victory of self-renunciation? We shrink from re-opening the sorrows of the past. Yet we should never hesitate to probe the wounds of the soul with an unfaltering hand. Jesus teaches no such mistaken compassion. We look back to the grave in which our hopes were buried in the bitterness of the

first experience of grief. Have we forgotten its lesson in the excitements of subsequent life? Or did we triumph through a living faith? *Did* we triumph? Then why is the grave still covered with gloom, as when we first laid within it a darling hope? He who goes once rightly to its side begins to say even amid his flowing tears, "O grave! where is thy victory?" We know that the repetition of trial does not remove its bitterness. No familiarity can make the angel of affliction appear otherwise than the messenger of grief. We may not escape the sadness, or be saved from all its agony. It is of the "new heaven" of the soul, to which none on earth really ascend, that the writer of the Revelation speaks when he says, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." We cannot enter now upon that day of unbroken peace. But we may behold its dawn. *One* true reception of the lesson of sorrow will partially raise us above its power. If we do not find it so in our experience, it is a confession of our previous unfaithfulness. He who has once looked in true self-renunciation upon the sepulchre, will see only the linen clothes lying there when called thither again, as did the apostles who went to the tomb of the risen Jesus. It can never be again, as of old, the place of death. He may bedew its sod with tears; but light beams all the while through the tears, and forms the bow of hope. Why should we not fear when no such results are realized in our experience? If our souls are tried, yet not instructed, chastened, yet not blessed, there is cause to fear that our fancied resignation was a dream, and that

our lamps will not be found trimmed and burning when the bridegroom cometh.

There is a profound wisdom in the prayer of Jesus, that his disciples should not be taken out of the world, but kept from the evil. Christianity does not shrink from any form of sacrifice, or veil its nature or its greatness. It does not conceal one point in the crown of thorns which it places upon the brow. It does not seek to array the cross in flowers. There is one unvarying condition of discipleship which sends a chill of fear to all partial self-renunciations. It is ever the same; "*Take up thy cross and follow.*" One spirit reigns throughout the Redeemer's hours of suffering. He always refuses the wine and the myrrh. It is a divine wisdom. There is no sure solace for the tried soul except in an unconditional, absolute submission. In proportion as it approaches that position it ascends towards a perfect rest. Man must seek repose in an unquestioning trust in God. It is not wise to make even those thoughts that may appear like assured hopes, the foundation of our repose. We may form many conceptions of the future that are cheering to the heart. The glad scenes of recognition, as parents, children, friends, go to join the departed ones, may awaken thrills of rapture in the breast. Bright pictures of the heavenly world may be formed in the chamber of grief, and hung around its walls, and almost beguile us for a season from the remembrance of our sadness. And fervent desires to soar away to a rest so joyous may fill the heart, which may be the result of secret unreconciliation, rather than of a triumphant faith. But although such thoughts tempt to no positive unreconciliation, although

they may appear in perfect harmony with the clear revelations of God's love, still it is not wise to rest upon them for consolation. What can our best conceptions of the modes of future existence be, but the feeble attempts of finite minds to comprehend the ways of infinite love! Our brightest dreams may fail, not because God's love will cease, but because that love will bestow a greater blessedness than heart hath yet conceived. Rest only, and rest forever, upon faith in that unfathomed and unfathomable love. Rest upon that love which may disappoint human hopes only to confer blessings too great to enter into our earthly dreams. Do not limit that boundless benignity by curious speculations concerning its special ministries of mercy. - Do not be lured into forgetfulness of the full bitterness of the cup which is now given you to drink, even by revelling in those bright conceptions of the future which faith seems to sanction and unfold.

It is no mystery to find that Jesus never prayed that his disciples should be taken from the world, or saved from any crosses which it might build. When we place ourselves in his point of view, and see the path before those first apostles as it then disclosed itself to his mind, his petition for them seems a *dread* prayer. For the hour in the garden which had just passed, the hour of crucifixion then at hand, were only symbols to his prophetic soul of the path of trial and of tears, of toils and of martyrdom, wherein his disciples were to walk. He saw the crown of sacrifice and of thorns to be platted for every true confessor's brow. Yet, standing between Gethsemane and Calvary, he does not pray for alleviation or escape. He only asks for endurance,

and for victory. And it is no mystery that, in his own example, he teaches the sufferers of all ages to wave away every draught of wine and myrrh. The great physician is too compassionate to desire to beguile us by a false solace, or by superficial healing. It is because he is the Redeemer that his call to sacrifice becomes so apparently unrelenting. He would save from no cross whose ministry would be needful. Neither would he diminish the *pain* of the cross. We sometimes forget the nature of a divine love. There is a love infinitely higher than the tenderness which seeks to outrun the wishes of its object, lest its happiness should be clouded for a season. It is the love which wounds in order to heal. Do we not know that the law which demands toil on earth, and thus develops energy and strength in man, is a glorious proof of the Father's love? Do we not know that the Providence which appoints the cross to all who have aught within the heart that needs crucifixion, is the special token of His eternal benignity? God's love appears in the path of self-renunciation trodden by the Son of God; that path which led at first through the temptations of the wilderness, and through Gethsemane at its close. It was the beloved Son of God who was called to tread that thorny road. And they are dear children too who tread a similar path of trial and of glory. For inasmuch as the peace of God transcends the brief delights of unchastened desire, so this divine love transcends that weakness of affection which often dwells in human hearts.

Jesus sanctions no prayer that his followers should be saved from exposure to suffering. "Not to take

them from the world, but to keep them from the evil," is his only petition. And none beside should ascend from our lips. Indeed, if we were wise, we should not dare to evade any form of trial. For the degree of our trial is the measure of our need of the discipline. In the feeling which it awakens we may see the nature and the magnitude of the work yet to be accomplished in our hearts. That is a sure revelation of the distance between our own lives and an enduring rest. Few men live who are not patient in untroubled hours. We should scarcely be *human* if we could not retain our serenity when no clouds darken our path. When we can bear life's smaller crosses with an unruffled breast, when we can learn to stand amid mockings and revilings with an unreviling and forgiving patience, when we can enter the garden of trial and never permit the forehead to be furrowed by a murmuring thought even while it is bathed in a bloody sweat, then we begin to realize the sublime idea of trust which Jesus teaches. We should not dare to benumb the heart, by any deceptive draught, to the pain which may reveal its actual condition. Though we should be plunged into a distress fitly imaged by the anguish of him who could find no drop of water to cool his burning tongue, what could that reveal but the breadth of the gulf between the heart and the lowly faith which reposed in Abraham's bosom? Though the tempest should rage around us as it beat upon the disciples on the lake of Galilee, what could that reveal except the fact that the spirit of the Lord had never yet spoken in the heart with a sovereign voice to bid its agitations cease? Let no

veil be woven to hide such truths from our view. Let the heart render thanksgivings for the Providence that reveals it to itself. How plainly we can discern the spirit of the Redeemer's life! That teaches us to desire no deliverance, except through spiritual victory. It will not permit us to make the crown of thorns easier to the brow. It teaches us to wear it with a consenting heart; to say, "Not my will, but thine be done," until through a victorious faith and trust every thorn shall ray out a stream of holy light, such as is often pictured around the head of Jesus in his hour of trial and of triumph.

There is but one possibility of misapprehension in respect to the doctrine which the text enforces. There is a process of self-torture in which some brood over their suffering. They not only look at the present trial until they see its every feature, but they look at that alone. The little cloud is magnified until it covers sun and sky. They refuse to be comforted not only because they desire to drink the cup which Providence presents to their lips. They have a morbid feeling which feeds upon grief. No such self-torture is sanctioned by the spirit of the Christian teaching. It is as free from morbid grief as from a desire to hide the actual trial from the heart. Jesus neither seeks, nor shuns, suffering or shame. He passes away from the enraged people when no imperative call of truth forbids. He stands serenely in their midst when his hour has come. He courts no trial. He shrinks from none, however great. He builds no cross for himself. He fears none which the world may build. In no point of

view does Jesus appear more glorious than in this absolute freedom from every trace of self-torture, even while he waves away every draught of wine and myrrh. And when we look at the mistakes on either side in the lives of the purest disciples, we can only exclaim with increasing faith, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

It is not torture, but discipline, which Christianity enjoins. It never adds one tittle of weight to the trial which the Father's love appoints. It never takes one tittle of its weight away. It remembers the spirit of that dread word in the Apocalypse in reference to the unfolding of the great book of God's Providence, and the teachings that are written therein; "Whosoever taketh away from the words of this book, from him shall be taken his part in the book of life." Whosoever beareth not the cross in the depth of its sacrifice, from him shall be taken the peace that its sacrifice will bring. There is a sublime Scripture which says, "I waited patiently for the Lord." It embodies the spirit of divine trust. There is no impatient haste to see the light of the Father's countenance while it is still veiled. The heart lays itself low in the hand of God. It calmly bears its own infirmities while it besieges the throne with its prayers for strength. It patiently wears the sackcloth of grief while it never leaves the mercy-seat in its supplications. It prays as the rent and bleeding heart is permitted to pray. But its prayer is suggested and guided by the spirit of submission. To feel the pang, yet not to shrink from the suffering, to pray for deliverance, yet to have no repining thought — who shall bestow that victorious patience?

“Come! learn thy Saviour’s peace:
 That Saviour, fount of good,
 Who from his birth sought no release
 From suffering, tears, and blood.

“O come! the holy cross
 Do thou in patience bear;
 Who meekly meets its shame and loss,
 Its perfect peace may share.”

AUGUST 30, 1840.

V.

THE SIGN OF PROMISE.



WHEN I BRING A CLOUD OVER THE EARTH, THE BOW SHALL BE
SEEN IN THE CLOUD. — Genesis ix. 14.

THUS God is recorded to have spoken to Noah and his sons when they went forth from the ark to re-people the earth. Every thing except that little company had been swept away. God had passed over the world in judgment. But after the flood, the bow appeared in the cloud as a symbol of love to the re-appearing earth. And the record tells us that it was then made a sign of promise that no flood should again visit the earth. It was the token of God's everlasting covenant between Himself and every living creature through all generations. It was the bright seal of heaven spanning the sky, seen anew after every storm, whose glorious device should whisper to the heart an assurance of grace and love.

We leave the consideration of the literal history. The correspondence between it and the great facts of spiritual experience attracts our thought. The text

not only expresses a fact in the natural world, but it symbolizes a truth in the world of spiritual life, in the profound experience of the individual heart. The deluge and the bow are always connected in life. They are cause and effect. And as the bow appeared after the deluge as a token of God's everlasting covenant with all flesh, so it appears in its brightness to the individual heart as the assurance of a covenant between itself and its God, when the imperfections of its life have been swept away by a flood. When God brings a cloud over the heart he sets his bow in the cloud. Observe some of the illustrations of a truth which is so full of consolation and hope.

Man can never truly see God until every thing earthly and selfish in his life has been entirely swept away. A flood must destroy the old earth and all its works. The living conviction of God's ever-present and boundless grace, for example, is the result of the deepest sense of dependence. So long as man retains a vestige of the fancy that there is a power within himself which can be exerted without the immediate presence and aid of God, he cannot realize the perfection of the Father's love. Every such thought must pass away. Every *dream* of man that he can exist or act without an agency of God which is as direct as in any miracle of the past, must be dispelled. And then, when he looks around in absolute lowliness, when he feels that he only breathes by the breath of God, that he only thinks and feels through His indwelling spirit, then the bow appears in its brightest promise. That entire prostration of soul alone reveals this token of the covenant of grace between God and man, the Father

and his child. Once, he habitually recognized nothing above his own strength. Once he only saw the ever-present God in events which awakened peculiar wonder and awe. Now each breath is a gift. "The hairs of his head are numbered." Every thought of purity is an interposition of grace. Wonderful as miracles are all whisperings of truth. Is it not clear that every thought which prevents the conviction of dependence must be overcome, before this sweet, this redeeming sense of God's present grace can be realized? Then is the Lord God's voice heard among the trees. Then do we know that it is the Comforter that whispers in the soul to check its passion, or to soothe its fears. Then do we practically and joyfully believe, that

"Every virtue we possess,
And every victory won;
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone."

But why should we linger upon particular illustrations of the truth which we are contemplating? We turn to its most complete illustration in the change which comes in the regeneration of the soul. The deluge must sweep over all, or man is not born again. Must not the heart yield an unreserved submission to the word and will of God, in order that the whole body may be full of light? When the eye is single, the light appears. While there are two warring wills, the will of the flesh contending against the will of God speaking through the conscience, man can never see the sign of the covenant set on high in his soul. Then he dwells in continual unrest. He is distracted by the

conflicting claims of the undeniable law and the rebellious passion. His heart is like the seat of a civil warfare, desolated by the strife. What he wills, he does not. What he wills not, that he does. While there is one reservation in the will of man the peace of God cannot come. That reservation banishes true peace by an irrevocable law. Question not the great truth that man must experience spiritual unrest until he voluntarily subjects every thing to the voice of God who walks with him in every garden, and, at "the cool of the day," in his hours of reflection, asks, "What is this that thou hast done?" When the selfish will is overcome, the peace of the adoption and atonement begins. "There is no condemnation to them" who are thus born anew. The beauty of the Father's will is first perceived when it is regarded with a consenting heart. The law which once spoke in thunder to the rebellious soul, is seen to be grace and truth to the reconciled spirit. After the deluge the bow of promise appears. Where the cloud once frowned upon the heart, that sign of the covenant, that smile of God is seen, to soothe its fears to rest.

The great events in the history of the world are symbols of the great events in the experience of the individual heart. The record of the race is written anew in the progress of each single life. To every man there must come a flood. The necessity is found in the fact that he has fallen, and has thus created a rebellious will which resists the commandments that are written by the finger of God upon tables of stone, and upon the more enduring tablet of the heart. For whoso liveth and sinneth not, himself even being witness? A

deluge must come to sweep away every vestige of the corrupted earth which this corrupted will has formed. And this unreserved surrender of the heart is its birth in God. When the will of the flesh is subdued the word of God is revealed to the soul in blessed disclosures of truth and light. Then Christ is born in the heart. And as the angels sang when the Son of Mary was laid in the manger, in tones that reached and enraptured mortal ears, so do the heavenly hosts always sing when the Christ is born in the soul of man. They strike their harps anew over every sinner that repenteth. The flood must first come; and then the bow of promise appears, bending in beauty to embrace the trusting child, and the sweet whisper never ceases to be heard, "It is the token of the everlasting covenant between me and thee."

Here we may find an explanation of facts in the deep spiritual experience of men, and in the Providences which often appear mysterious. Here is the explanation of the mystery that the saddest experiences are often the most blessed; that the sweetest sense of God's eternal love is felt by those whom he seems to visit with the severest dispensations. Who will speak in more heartfelt tones of the overflowing, changeless love of the Father, than those lowly and stricken ones who are fed by the ravens like the prophet of old, or are standing by the graves of those who were most dear? Where do you find the "love casting out fear" more frequently than in those hearts upon which Providence has apparently laid the heaviest burdens? How often has the wail of discontent alternated with the voices of mirth in the palaces of the world, in the

weary intervals between their feasts, while from the bereaved home the spirit's song of consolation has sweetly sounded upon the silent air. Where do you see piety more entirely free from distrust, the visible smile of God overspreading the face of his child, than upon the countenances of those who kneel in prayer amid the wreck of earthly hopes, or by the lonely hearth? These things are not mysteries to the spiritual eye. When the flood sweeps away every earthly trust we turn to the Everlasting. The words, "We cannot be quickened except we *die*," have a far deeper meaning when applied to the birth of a spiritual life than that which we often give them. For the loss of each outward blessing becomes to the faithful heart a direct gift of inward strength. The soul learns to walk without that staff. It draws new life from the eternal fountains, and attains, in the strength of God, a more truly self-subsisting energy.

We perceive here also, why Providence reduces man, by an unsparing hand, to the loneliness and desolation of sorrow. The sense of inward want must be awakened in the soul. And often no ministry can awaken it except that of grief. The finite to which we cling must be rent from our grasp. And then the infinite first rises in its beauty before the praying heart. I have seen one who intellectually assented to the bright truths of the Gospel, but who had not passed through the valley of self-renunciation to the mountain height of a spiritual faith and love. Three times, with a suddenness that gave no warning, a blooming child was changed to lifeless clay. All whom God had given were taken again. And then, when the deluge had

swept over all, the self-renouncing heart saw the bow set high in the cloud, bright in promise and hope. And a heart that has once realized that promise, knows that it shall never fail. How continually our thoughts turn to Jesus as the beginning and end of all illustrations of the deeper life of the soul! Who ever experienced a loneliness like his? Upon him the cross was laid. What gift that seems dear to the undisciplined heart did not Providence take away from him? Upon whom did God lay so great a burden as upon the beloved Son? But who has uttered the word Father as it came from his lips? In the immediate presence of his keenest suffering, he said, "*My peace* I leave with you." The Son of Man dwelt in heaven while he lived upon the earth, and communed with angels in his hour of agony. It is amid the scattering of earthly hopes and the experiences of grief, from the stake of the martyr, from Gethsemane and from the cross of Jesus, that the deepest and most fervent expressions of confidence and love have ascended to heaven.

The manifestation of the infinite love comes to bless us when finite blessings are swept away. Sometimes we are permitted to see the verification of the ancient promise to those whom the deluge overflows. How often that sign appears when the bodily strength fails, and the last hour on earth draws near! Have you never seen the sweet assurance of the heart beam through the failing eye, like Heaven's smile of welcoming love? There is a joy then in the spirit which casts itself upon God such as the heart feels when it communes with the friend most dear upon earth. There is a confidence and trust such as the child experiences

when it clings with undoubting faith, in the hour of danger, to the mother's breast. There is a trust that looks up in joyful hope when speech fails, and murmurs forth its single prayer — all prayers in one —

“Thy will, my God ! thy will be done,
And let that will be mine.”

Then the sign of the covenant is seen. No wonderful token of acceptance appears. No voice from heaven speaks its benediction. But in the deep places of the soul *faith* hears that approving voice. And in the light which covers the changing features, the seal of heaven seems to be placed upon the countenance of the departing. Has Providence impressed a scene like this upon the tablet of memory ? Then fear the deluge no more. Trust in God's covenant sign.

How beneficently God directs the various ministries of life to lead man to this deep experience ! How it calls him to look up and see the sign of promise ! When regarded from this point of view, how beautifully significant his unrest appears, his devisings and disappointments, his continual search to find a home for the soul ! He builds up one fair structure after another, and writes upon each, “This shall satisfy the desire of the heart.” He gathers “men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men,” only to say, sooner or later, “This also is vanity !” The sigh is heard through the chambers of luxury when the peal of laughter dies upon the ear. As the soul looks out from the calm places of contemplation upon this ever-scheming, continually disappointing life, its varying scenes seem full of significance and of admonition.

How benignly this great Providence pursues the individual heart, suffering it to find no peace in superficial action, but constraining it, as it were, into rest ! Man does not know what a divine law controls him when he is compelled to turn in weariness from scenes that were once fair to his eye and heart. He does not recognize the voice of God which thus speaks to him in its blessed invitations. He feels the weariness, but knows not how to interpret its meaning. It is the sighing of his soul for the Father's house whence it has wandered. He understands it not ; and in a blindness like that of those who rejected the Redeemer, he rebels against this experience which invites him to seek his redemption. Truly may we say with one of the sainted spirits of the world, God has given all things to man but peace. And he is ever saying in his Providence,

“ Yet let man keep the rest ;
But keep them, with repining restlessness.
Let him be rich and weary ; that, at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.”

It is sad that man should need to feel the “weariness” before he will fly to his Father's breast. But it is sadder still that he should misinterpret the experience by which God would draw him to Himself. And saddest of all it is, that he should need flood after flood to sweep over his outward life before he will look in faith to the bright covenant of promise. What multitudes seek to build up Babel towers as their refuge ! In their vain dreams, they would raise themselves above the deluge that may come. Or, still more fre-

quently, when a present reliance fails, instead of casting themselves at once upon the everlasting arm, they take another brittle staff to supply the place of one already broken, and the soul possesses as little self-sustaining life as before. The home which the man builds for himself may appear more substantial than that which amused his childish dreams. But it may equally prove to be no abiding home for the soul, and be found, in the day of trial, to be based upon the sand.

Not to those who supply the place of one transient support by another as transient, not to those who fly to these Babel towers, can the fulfilment of the promise come. Yet, although it has not been verified by actual experience, every mind may see it to be an eternal truth, that if we turn to God in a conviction of absolute dependence a faith in his perpetual presence and boundless grace will come, to be quickened anew by every gift, to cheer the heart whenever we move or rest — whenever we rise up to toil, or lie down to repose. Then shall we feel ourselves forever in the Almighty's hand. If we accept the law of God with an absolute submission of will, we shall know the adoption of sons, whereby we may cry, "Abba, Father." Let an inward renunciation destroy our trust in the earthly and changing, and lead us to cling only to the everlasting, and the token of the covenant shall appear to the heart. And when, by that blessed discontent which will not cease until man returns to his Father's house, or by the desolation of his earthly home, or, more wisely still, by the voluntary surrender of his heart, he finds the flood imaged in his experience, and sees the covenant bow, it will be with the soul as it was

with the ancient earth. It can never more be overwhelmed. We recognize the truth of the glorious teaching. Let the spirit come to deepen the assent of the mind into the faith of the heart. Why will man be like the dove flying over the waste of waters, and finding no resting place for the sole of his foot? And why does he not return, like the dove, to the ark of God? Why does he not seek the true Sabbath of the soul in the repose of that trust which makes life a constant prayer; the Sabbath that makes the six days of labor, like the one day of worship, a rest unto the Lord? Why does he go mournfully on, seeing no smile of God, when the light of his present love may cheer every confiding heart? Beautiful was the significance of the covenant-sign to the elder world! It declared that seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, should no more cease. It declared that God would not again destroy the world which he had made. More beautiful is its significance to the individual soul! It not only declares that seed-time and harvest shall not cease, but that the winters of our earthly pilgrimage shall become as a perpetual summer. For the Lord God is an Everlasting Light; and the sun shall no more go down upon the heart that has seen the sign of the covenant. Even the seed-time shall be a harvest. "And when the cloud comes over the earth, the bow shall be seen in the cloud."

FEBRUARY 16, 1840.

VI.

BETHESDA.



FOR AN ANGEL WENT DOWN AT A CERTAIN SEASON INTO THE POOL, AND TROUBLED THE WATER: WHOSOEVER THEN FIRST, AFTER THE TROUBLING OF THE WATER, STEPPED IN, WAS MADE WHOLE OF WHATSOEVER DISEASE HE HAD. — John v. 4.

THE text is a beautiful instance of an ancient mode of speech. It attributes the troubling of the waters to the descent of an angel. Modern speculation sometimes lays a rude hand upon such forms of expression. The final result of this speculation will doubtless be a more intimate recognition of a present God. The time will come in which faith will not see an angel, but the Father himself, in every ministry of healing and of love. But we may learn to disbelieve in the angels before we gain a profound conviction of a present God. The heavens may become empty of all these messengers before they are filled to our imagination and our faith with the one universal light and love. We might inquire into the particular elements which gave a peculiar virtue to

those healing waters at certain seasons, until, in the discussion concerning natural causes, the idea of an angel's or even of the Father's presence would vanish. It is sad, that, in the progress of thought, even a momentary tendency should be found to sever the golden chain which binds all events directly to the throne of God. It is more philosophical, as well as more grateful to the heart, to accept the mode of expression which the text presents, than to go one step upward in the train of causes, and neglect to ascend to the great Cause of all. It was an angel who troubled the waters; and their healing power was a distinct manifestation of God's love in the universe. And were not the waters themselves God's angels, messengers of his changeless love and sweet compassion?

The troubled pool possessed a peculiar virtue. Bethesda — that is to say, house of mercy — was its customary and significant name. And multitudes of the diseased gathered in its porches to receive the blessing. We select the text, of course, on account of its symbolic application to human experience; for everywhere the troubled waters seem to be God's especial messengers of healing.

That is an angelic ministry which startles man from his habitually superficial mode of life. The great difficulty is to awaken the heart to the consciousness of its actual and infinite necessities. It sleeps upon the surface of its own affections, unconscious of those hidden treasures of a deeper life which lie all unseen, like the fairest gems in the ocean caves. The waters must often be troubled, that these may be thrown upward into view. The life of numberless souls is like the life of

childhood. It may seem bright and fair, yet it is superficial still. It does not dream of wants whose cry shall be as surely heard when it is awakened to a more comprehensive life, as the cry of the infant when it awakes to its earthly being. And when that consciousness is really born, as the child instinctively nestles closely to the parent here, so the feeble soul, the offspring of God, clings to its Father's breast. When the intense conviction of spiritual unworthiness begins to be felt, it reveals dread necessities, unrealized before. Then man perishes with the new hunger which preys upon him. What he once welcomed as the food of his existence becomes only husks; and the troubling of his deep affections must banish rest, until he arise, and mid difficulties and tears, retrace his steps, and tread over again the long path of his wanderings, and return to his Father's feet. No lower, no finite aim can longer avail, when the sense of this infinite need is once awakened. Thou wandering, or prodigal child, once wandering but now reclaimed, was there any peace for thee, until, in a sweet submission, the kiss of reconciliation from the Father assured thee of thy forgiveness? And couldst thou fail to flee to him, scourged on by the conviction of unworthiness and want, and sweetly drawn by remembrance of the love in that Father's house? And was not the troubling of the pool the chosen ministry of healing, the angel of that redemption? The same law acts within the heart whenever any deep experience, any day of saddening change reveals the infinitude of its desires and wants. All transient refuges must be forsaken then. The remembrance of the infinite arises within the breast in its exceeding beauty;

a covert from the tempest, a refuge from the storm. The soul is like the dove sent out from the ark, flying over the waste of waters, seeking a resting place in vain. It can only return from its sad and disappointed flight, and implore that the hand of love may be put forth again and take it to its only rest.

Bethesda, the troubled pool, the house of mercy to hearts in need of healing. I am alike impressed with the almost universal necessity of this ministry of sorrow, and with its power when it comes. It is not a necessity of God's Providence, abstractly considered, but a necessity which arises from the general position of human hearts. Life is generally superficial until its great deeps are broken up. Often it becomes a routine that is scarcely visited by new convictions, or blessed by the vision of new and higher truths. Man will take no forward step until he is called by some apparently rough and unwelcome voice, to unaccustomed thoughts and feelings before unknown. So is it among the nations. Therefore the days of great and terrible revolutions are, so frequently, the days of the world's special advancement. And the occasionally rapid progress of more quiet ages is often but the unfolding of principles that were established in its heart in times of revolution which troubled its very deeps. So it especially is in individual experience. Man often refuses to seek the healing of his spirit until he is driven, as it were, by a stern necessity. He too seldom listens to the still small voice of truth in his breast, while outward voices salute his ear with music. He too seldom seeks a profound inward life while the outward life is beautiful. He must generally see that beauty fade.

Disappointment must cloud his hitherto sunny existence, ere he will believe, with the living faith of the soul, that all these outward things shall wax old like a garment. The experience of ages might instruct. But it often avails little until it becomes our own. How often must those who plead for Truth despair of penetrating the soul until each word shall be enforced by the troubling angel! And are they not authorized to feel thus? Even Jesus, the incarnation of God, spoke in vain when there was no ear to hear. How true to human experience is that declaration of the Master, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of God!" It had no narrow meaning in the mind of Jesus. It involves a principle which applies to all whose life is clothed in outward charms; and it warns them of the danger of neglecting the life within. Jesus condenses all human experience into one true and startling maxim, when he says, "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for such to enter into the kingdom of God."

The troubled pool is the great Bethesda for human hearts. And its blessed power when we are led down into its waters is as impressive as the fact of the practical necessity of such a ministry. We do not always find healing there. But we can no more return to our former superficial life. The conviction of the soul's everlasting necessities, once felt, can never be buried again in oblivion. The man cannot become a child again. The peace of childhood is forever gone. The soul realizes the condition of those who were driven from Eden's bowers. A sword turns every way to guard the gate against all possibility of return. It

must thenceforth walk in the path of suffering, where thistles and thorns pierce the feet, or it must press on to the paradise of God. And if the spiritual healing really come, the soul perceives the majesty of the inward life in contrast with all outward gifts. In the hours of intense spiritual conviction, in times of deep and bitter sorrow, we need no human exhortations against the folly of outward supports. No eloquence can overstate what the heart then knows and feels. Before the truly awakened spirit, the earth with all its grandeur and its glory seems rolled together as a scroll. It stands alone before its God, and feels that it must perish without his benediction, his forgiving and sustaining presence.

And these peculiar experiences not only awaken new and nobler feelings, but they invest the usual course of life with new meaning and power. They impart new insight into "the whole and every part" of the Divine Providence, so that the fall of the sparrow becomes a ministry of grace. The blessing obtained at Bethesda will rest upon every place, even where no troubling angel is sent with his instructions. Thus do all things become new to the living man, until he gazes upon new heavens and a new earth. So it must be of necessity. When the feeling changes, the outward life seems to be also changed. Even the development of a true taste, which opens the eyes to perceive the radiant beauty of this world of nature, invests a thousand scenes, before unmarked, with new charms, and causes them to become the ministers of delight. The awakened, far-reaching mind discerns new meanings in common life, as the keen eye sees objects clearly defined

in the far horizon, where another perceives nought but mist. So the new inward life arouses the soul to a recognition of the direct presence of God. It is like the ministry of the miracle which compels the slumbering heart to perceive the present God in an unwonted and startling experience, and thus prepares it to behold an equal glory in every beam of light and every drop of dew. Indeed, what could man need except the spirit of faith and love which the redeemed possess, to make all things fair, even here, as the New Jerusalem?

The troubling ministry is peculiarly the ministry of healing. Here is a consideration which is most humbling to the pride of man, but which peculiarly illustrates the Father's mercy — a consideration which instantly bids our murmurs cease. It is not the eternal purpose of God's Providence, but it is man's indifference which makes these unusual dispensations peculiarly the angels of mercy. He may obtain this inward life without the struggle, if he will hear the never-ceasing calls of the infinite Providence. Why will he wait until the darkening of the outward world compels him to look within? Why will he not be moved by God's encircling love, which pleads with him for ever? It is indeed a self-renouncing spirit which must be gained; a spirit ready to suffer at the call of truth, and to submit to the will of God. And man is in great peril of self-deception until the actual cross is laid upon his shoulder. Still, while life is bright, he may yield his affections so gently to the truth that he will gain the same spirit. What men term a cross will then be no cross to him. When man becomes a true child, disobedience becomes the severest cross. God's Providence

is always full of redeeming ministries. The healing streams are always gushing from the eternal fountain. Man need not wait for the troubling angel to descend before he can be healed. The angels are always speaking with their sweet voices of instruction, if he will but hear. There is not one of those deeper affections of the human heart which bind us with the strongest ties to earth, that was not designed to awaken the capacity for an infinitely higher and deeper love, and thus to lead the soul onward to its home in God. The angels cry and plead everywhere. They "stand by the way, in the places of the paths, at the coming in at the doors." None need to wait for a helping hand to put them into the pool at the favored season. God's Providence is a perpetual house of mercy, whose gates are open day and night forevermore.

It is a most humiliating thought, that man must be *driven* to seek his rest. The invisible things of God are witnessed and revealed by this world of beauty. Man might hear the voice of the Lord God forever walking with him in the garden, until, in the perpetual consciousness of that holy presence, no miracle would be needful to open the spirit's ear. He might hear the angels always hovering near, and never lose the sense of an intimate communion between his own soul and a higher world. But while the necessity of a peculiar ministry humbles man, the fact that it comes, illustrates and glorifies the Father's mercy. Is it not the most subduing thought of God, the sweetest conviction, that he pursues our unwilling hearts with a cloud of reclaiming messengers? It is the peculiar power of the cross itself, that it was borne for sinners. If the waters must be trou-

bled in order to heal, is not the troubling angel a messenger of especial love? If the rock must be smitten, as of old, what is so merciful as the rod which smites it, that its living fountains may be gushing out? What more merciful than to bring us into the kingdom of heaven by violence, if we do not hear and obey the gentler invitations of the spirit of grace? In what profound humility, in what fervent gratitude may we say in such visitations, "An angel descended to trouble the water, that we might be persuaded and constrained to step in and be healed."

And here, once more, is the everlasting rebuke to every murmuring thought. Dost thou murmur, thou stricken child of God? Do dark and gloomy questionings ever rise within thee even in the hour of agony? These unusual ministries do not always instruct us. As men disregarded once both the usual Providence of love, and the wondrous life of Jesus, so may we now disregard the various angels of God. We may not live for the inward life, even though outward disappointment comes. Ten thousand human hearts are here who refuse to step in and be healed, although they have been lying long in their infirmities, and have felt, at many seasons, the heavy burden of disease. Thou murmuring child! does not the world need chastening? Even amidst its chastening it perseveres in its sin. Dost *thou* complain? Number the messengers of God whom thou hast permitted to pass unheeded by, and thou wilt put thy hand upon thy mouth and be dumb. Consider this, and thy silence will be broken by no complaints. Thou wilt only say, "Let the troubling

angel descend that my spirit may be led to the fount of healing and of life."

The troubling ministry is the angel of healing. Humanity looks upward indeed, in hope, to a nobler condition of the soul. It is one of the bright promises respecting the heavenly life that, "There shall be no more sea." It indicates a state in which the need of the trial shall be past. The heart will be fixed in God, and tears shall be wiped away. The thought of that great attainment never dies in the human breast. All experiences of disquiet and unrest only serve to make the longing for its attainment more intense. It is the promised land which is never forgotten in all our wanderings. What indeed is the world seeking with vehement effort and desire, as it is tossed upon a restless sea of hopes and fears? What is it seeking but a state of rest in which "there will be no more sea?" That thought floats over us as a dim but unforgotten hope. Yet it is a practical truth, that only through the trial and the cross do we enter into rest. When the last rebellious passion has been crucified, and no feeling of unreconciliation remains, when the voice of Jesus has said, with commanding power, to every storm within the heart, "Peace, be still"—there can be "no more sea." What long and torturing denials must come through our faithlessness, what self-crucifixions, what agonies of bereavement and tears, before these causes of disquiet can be destroyed! Who can say how often he may need to be led into the garden where he may sweat as it were great drops of blood, before he can say, "Not my will, but thine, be done?" For unfallen hearts, the passage into the heavenly life is natural as

the opening of the bud into the flower. To be made perfect through temptation and suffering is the law, and the only hope for fallen man. The CROSS is the symbol of the life of the redemption. The true disciple looks up amid his imperfections and his fears, rejoicing that this way of life is opened to his steps, though he can only travel therein with weary and bleeding feet. He is willing to drink the cup which the Master drank, to receive the baptism wherewith he was baptized, that he may be also glorified with him. He welcomes the troubling angels, that he may ascend to the life where all agitations shall cease, and there can be "no more sea."

JULY 21, 1889.

VII.

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN.



BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN : FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED. — Matthew v. 4.

THAT “they shall be comforted ” is the conviction of every trusting heart, however impenetrable the mystery to the eye of the understanding. For when the heart once believes that Infinite Love reigns, the mystery of the universe can excite no fear. It knows that there can be no contradictions in a system where every thing is instinct with life through the power of the omnipresent Father. That glorious fact is proof that all things must arrange themselves in obedience to one benignant law. No sparrow falls without the Father’s notice. He numbereth the hairs of our head. There are mysteries still. But they are the mysteries of an unfathomable love. Such a faith awakens in the heart a prophecy of coming good in the midst of apparent evil. Thick clouds may often seem to be lowering over it. But, above them all, Faith discerns the serene, eternal

stars. Its fervent trust robes even the clouds in light. It feels the darkness of the night. But it always predicts the morning. As the never-failing faith in a coming Messiah cheered the trusting hearts among God's ancient people, and they sang the song of that hope in their captivity by the rivers of Babylon, so faith in God, and in his promises, always cheers his suffering, yet trusting children, with the hope of brighter issues. Faith confidently says to the mourner, "You shall be comforted." It knows that sorrow would never have been appointed except as a ministry of blessing. It sees not when the divine result of present suffering shall be revealed. But, like the Patriarch who foresaw the Messiah's day, and was glad, it perceives this blessed day of peace afar, and is still.

Every mystery will be regarded as the inscrutable design of an infinite love when man actually believes that a Father reigns. Indeed, his only refuge lies in that childlike trust. Over all the movements of the eternal Providence he sees an impenetrable cloud. In the smallest circle within his view questions arise which he cannot answer. The angel and the worm are alike messengers of the Father's will, agents in the accomplishment of his eternal purposes. The smallest thing is connected with infinite laws and has infinite relations. Man can never fully understand its meaning until all these relations are seen as they appear to the mind of God. No less comprehensive view can perfectly reveal the importance of each little event for the accomplishment of his serene and unchanging counsels. And to the child of time, this insight can never come. Still, as his love and confidence increase, the

prophecy, rather than the lamentation, becomes the habitual feeling of the heart. And could that feeling be made supreme, could it bring that sweet Sabbath of rest which is realized in the soul that makes God its portion and its home, why should he not look upon all things in trusting faith, and pronounce them to be good forever?

But man may repeat the text with a still brighter faith. He is not left to the prophecy of a trusting heart alone. It is a glorious fact that the most cheering truths seem inseparably connected with the darker dispensations of Providence. The needed blessing is folded up within the experience of trial, as the flower within the bud. God's angels do not dwell apart, in other worlds of thought and feeling, far removed from our own. Then they might come indeed at our earnest call, to bear us up in the time of need by their sympathizing hands. But, in a still sweeter mercy, they crowd the *same* world to which the trial introduces us, and unveil themselves to every reflecting heart. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted," was the word of Jesus. Blessed are they that mourn, for they *are* comforted by that very experience, is the idea which I suppose he intended to convey. Here, as everywhere in Christ's teaching, the promise is the direct and natural result of the feeling or sentiment to which he refers. We desire to pursue a train of reflection which illustrates this delightful thought.

What indeed is the evident mission of these continual changes? The breaking up of one mode of life, through painful experience, is always designed to be the opening of another and a wider sphere of thought and feel-

ing. This is true, for example, in the disturbing changes of early life. The youth turns away in sadness from his early home to enter upon new and untried scenes. But the change is only a birth into a broader life. He leaves his former home. He goes out into the world. He ends his childhood. He becomes a man. As more extensive views of nature suddenly salute his eyes when he first climbs the hills around his childhood's dwelling-place, and gazes upon crowded towns and waving forests and boundless prospects that stretch out before his wondering sight, so when he bids farewell to narrow associations, however sweet, yet narrow still, modes of thought and forms of life hitherto unknown arise before his wondering mind. The days of thoughtless freedom are gone forever. But the new experience of responsibility is the chosen means of unfolding the spirit's energy. He can no longer repose upon that parental wisdom which has hitherto solved every difficulty. But the day which casts him painfully upon himself may become the birthday of a living soul. It is with him, in this crisis of his life, as with the disciples of Jesus when their Master departed. When they could lean no more upon his breast they were thrown upon themselves; and in that development of their inward life, the Comforter came, to be a constant guest within their souls. Truly it was expedient for the disciples that Jesus should go away. And it is expedient for youth to go away from the Eden of childhood, where every tree "good for food" grows without his toil, and to be cast upon himself, and forced to develop a manly strength. Indeed, these early dreams must be dispelled before the soul can look forth upon a

grander world; a world full of mountain paths which it may be difficult to climb, but which lead to wider prospects at every step of the ascent. The process is imaged in the transformations of the natural world. The worm, which only moved upon the surface of the earth, dies, and a higher life is created, which takes wings and soars into the air. So the soul, when it outgrows its infant experience, soars into new and nobler realms of thought and life.

One illustration brings the universal, unchanging law before our view. The condition of the spirit in every stage of its progress is that of infancy. All the revolutions in its life are but successive steps towards a maturer strength. How divine the Providence which wounds only to bless; which breaks the accustomed form of life, only to lead the spirit on another step in its progress! New facts are thus introduced into the mind which were unperceived before. The narrow portion of the world in which we lived vanishes away. It is because we have ascended to a height whence we overlook its boundaries, and do not regard them as limitations. The progress of life is like the progress of thought when the imperfect faith which we once cherished passes away. All is confusion and doubt for a season. The foundations on which we rested crumble. The soul is affrighted by its own deep questions. But soon we find that the destruction of one form of faith is a progress towards a diviner thought. It is like the overthrow of Judaism by Christianity. The law is universal. "Blessed are they that mourn." Are they not comforted when they are led through the suffering to a more exalted life?

But we do not perceive the full development of this law until we contemplate the most dreaded change in the circles of human love — the change of death. Other changes introduce wider views of present existence. This at once transcends the bounds of time. There may be faith in an immortal life before the departure of the loved calls forth every capacity of thought and feeling in meditations upon its scenes. Yet, practically, the soul may live in worldly aims and hopes. “Blessed are they that mourn.” Then come the thoughts that wander through Eternity. Death, when it draws so near, tends at once to make the boundless future a familiar theme of contemplation. The soul looks upward and endeavors to see through the clouds which gently part to receive the lost out of our sight. We follow them into the invisible world, that we may gain clearer conceptions of their heavenly home, as we follow absent friends here, over land and sea, in the fond meditations of affection. What new and bright thoughts of a more exalted life then come to cheer the soul! It learns to delight itself in immortal prospects. It “views the landscape o’er.” It imagines the life of the redeemed, and of blessed angels, whose chiefest joy is praise, and whose rapture is in the accomplishment of the errands of infinite love. Quickened by its own nobler life, and touched by the hand of Jesus, the soul begins to see with clearer eyes. Heaven, which is little more than a glorious word to inexperienced hearts, unveils its eternal walls, and its enduring towers; its bright employments, and its blest abodes. There, in the midst of the New Jerusalem, is seen “the Lamb who is the light thereof.” And there is the Father’s throne.

If we press still more closely the argument which we are pursuing, experience will attest it at every step. We may look into the depths of affliction to find its most impressive confirmations. Every thing which makes us profoundly conscious of the power and depth of the heart's affections, has a sure tendency to impart more exalted views of that infinite love wherein is our repose. Thou mourning heart, waking in the agony of grief to learn the unknown might of human love, —has that love no fountain whence it flows? Man's reason leads him directly to that all-perfect Wisdom which it faintly yet divinely images. The transient rays of light in human souls suggest and unfold the idea of the Eternal Sun of truth; and the faint breathings of pure desire lead at once to the conception of that all-pervading spirit of holiness and love which encompasses every soul, alike as its inspiration and its end. "He that formed the ear, shall he not hear?" He that created the heart, shall he not love? The unfathomable capacities of human affection may bring to view their infinite source, in the trial-hour which most clearly reveals their depths. The agony of the human heart may thus reveal the depths of the divine. The affection that is ready to die for its object enables us to conceive of the deathless love in which we are enfolded. Shall His love fail who gave us the power to love? When it is rightly interpreted, every heaving of the bosom in sorrow is another revelation of these blessed thoughts. I know that those angels who watch over the little ones shall always behold the Father's face, when I see the depth of parental tenderness even here, amid the imperfections of earth. Thou mourning one!

thy tears speak to thee of the ceaseless droppings of the Eternal Mercy; and the full gush of thy grief gives thee assurance of the endless flowing of the divine compassion.

Here is a revelation of love which becomes clear and bright in proportion as the trial deepens. When those who have not been deeply loved depart, death awakens little grief, and calls forth no tears. We deem it a blessing to be called to bear no heavier visitations of sorrow. But such visitations bring no revelations. Unless the ministry of death awakens grief it leads to no crisis in the soul's experience, and can minister nothing to its growth. A trusting faith tells us to confide in the gracious promise, that strength shall come according to our day. Yet we may now see how the increase of the burden which we are called to bear tends to give us strength. God discloses traces of his working, although his ways may often lie in the trackless deep. When the agony is most intense, and the immortal power of human affection is most fully disclosed, then we become most capable of apprehending the unutterable love of God. When death appears most terrible, the victory may be most complete. Men especially weep over those great calamities which seem to be attended by no consolations. Let them weep. Jesus wept even by the grave which was to be opened in a moment by his word. Yet, let them remember, that these calamities may disclose the greatest and most consoling truths. And let them weep for themselves also, because they may be sitting in darkness through the want of the very teachings which such events may bring. For, "Blessed are they that mourn."

We refer to the lesson which these trying changes would naturally teach. Yet although their purpose is clear, this bright result may not be realized. We see multitudes who walk over the graves of kindred and hear no instructing voice. There is the silence of death and nothing more. They are not raised above the shadow and gloom. But are not they comforted whose hearts are lifted up to enlarged thoughts of eternity and of God? How invariably every course of reflection upon themes like this teaches us not to turn away from meditations upon these experiences of sorrow! We are to linger rather amidst the thoughts, and even the griefs, which they bring. No blessing comes from sorrow if we bury it in oblivion. Turn not away from the grave where the beloved is buried. Though it fills the eyes with tears to look upon it, go and weep there. It is not natural to turn away. It is not wise. Go and embalm the memory of the lost in the unchanging, the fragrant affections of the human heart. And when your own love comes forth in all its fervor to testify to the love of God, a sweet assurance shall enter the heart to say, "The lost is not there, but lives in the Father's presence." The voice of the Comforter shall then whisper to the silent soul. Go to the grave. And as you look down into its mystery, look upward too in the deepest affection, and the love of God shall be made clear to your soul. Go to the grave. And as you kneel there in the darkness, the resurrection morn, whose sun can no more go down, shall dawn upon your lowly heart.

From one point of view life appears as a perpetual succession of trying changes. No man lives to whom

pain, the prophet of dissolution, has not brought its warning. I see few homes without their vacant places. Some stand in gladness by your side. But the dust once made sacred by the spirits of others whom you loved sleeps where you have laid it, and they are gone. Yet what a ministry these changes are accomplishing! We read of a time when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth and all the works that are therein shall be burned up," and the new heavens and the new earth shall come forth from the creative hand of God. Providence seeks to accomplish in the experience of each individual heart what is thus written respecting the outward world. One outward heaven after another passes away. Man's earth, and the works that are therein, crumble beneath his feet, or change to ashes before his eyes. But each change is designed to be a clearer revelation of that new heaven of higher thought and purer feeling, wherein dwelleth righteousness. It shuts the gates of the grave upon his outward joy. But it opens wide the gate of the New Jerusalem to his soul. And were he truly heedful of the process, it would lead him to feel even though he looked upon the destruction of the outward universe, that the world of appearances was vanishing away in order that the world of realities might more distinctly appear.

We should cease to look so sadly upon this great ministry of sorrow when it overturns one form of life only to reveal to us another vastly more glorious. Yet one great qualification of the statement is to be remembered when we say that it overturns the former one. The spirit of previous life, all that was true and good,

remains and knows no decay. The former life is not lost when the new one begins. Whatever is of God will survive, and rise by its own immortal power above all change and apparent death. The truth of Judaism lived when its temple was levelled in the dust. The child leaves his home; but the life of that early home will reign in the wider sphere of action upon which he enters. The bodies of friends are laid in the grave. But they have an immortality even here upon the earth in their quickening memories, and in the impression of their virtues upon our loving hearts. And the *effect* of their deeds remains, though no friends should cherish their memories. There is a blessed law which ordains that nothing but the outward form can die. Nothing but dust can return to the dust again. The change which we mourn, although we do not perceive the process, is really doubly blessed. It separates the perishable from the divine in all former experience, and leaves the everlasting truth which it contained to shine more clearly, and to do an eternal work, within the soul. And then it adds the revelations of a nobler and more glorious form of life. Each passing event, like the ascending prophet, leaves its mantle behind it; and the soul upon which it falls is thenceforth anointed anew with the spirit of truth and power.

Blessed *are* they who are called to mourn, here and now, in an enlarged and more comprehensive life. They are blest in the divine views which open to their advancing minds. They are blest in the new perceptions of the divine love which hover over them, like angels, in their agonies. They are blest in grander

conceptions of existence. They lose one blessing only to receive another and a greater one; and they retain the best life of the former blessing also. One angel leaves them that another may come and minister unto them. Should not men repose in eternal, unquestioning trust, upon a Providence of such unutterable love? We do not select life's gayest scenes, where the voices of gladness and the sounds of mirth are heard, in order to demonstrate its benignity. We look upon mourning and bereavement; into the places of agony and tears; upon the groups of stricken spirits that are kneeling by lonely hearths and silent graves. Even there we plainly see the traces of an infinite love. We hear the words which promise a blessing to those who mourn, and we read the bright testimonies of experience which confirm the gracious promise. And if especial tokens of mercy are found in the ministries of sorrow, what radiant love will shine from brighter dispensations when their true glory shall be revealed? If here we see so much of grace in the trial and the gloom, what shall we behold with our more perfect sight? Children of heaven as we are, enfolded in a Providence so beneficent, what can we do but meekly trust?

NOVEMBER 10, 1839.

VIII.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF LIFE.



STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS ON THE EARTH. — Hebrews xi. 13.

THE text is often used to express a view of life which we entirely reject. Men sometimes speak as if this world were a prison, and life a confinement within its gloomy walls; and they compare the soul that looks beyond its limits, with immortal aspirations, to the caged bird which beats its wings against its prison bars, and longs for the hour of release, that it may fly in freedom through the boundless heaven. There will be moments in human life in which such an image represents the feeling of a deeply moved and earnest heart. When we climb the mountain we must sometimes walk by the side of fearful chasms; and while we thus struggle on amidst surrounding perils, we instinctively wish that we had already gained the summit. There are perilous passages in the pilgrimage of the soul to the mountain heights of life. There are moments in

the lives of the purest men in which they are tempted, pressed down, by sinful feelings which they cannot immediately destroy; moments in which they wish that they could at once be taken up from the perils of their discipline into the higher world towards which they journey. Still, although this feeling may often exist, it does not give a just view of man's present life. God did not make this world to be a prison for the soul. Even Nature, by her silent voice, proclaims a better faith. This universal life, this prodigality of beauty that adorns the earth, bears witness to the Father's constant presence and all-embracing mercy. God is not nearer to the accepted spirit who rejoices in the light before the throne, than he is to you and to me, even in our unbelieving and gloomy hours. His love flows out upon both sides of the tomb with an equal fulness. It will build a heaven for us here, and everywhere, when our hearts are prepared to receive its peace. The world has been blest, not cursed, since God looked upon every thing that he had made, and called it good. If the world seem a prison, and life a burden, the gloom is in the soul, and not in life itself. The wayward, undisciplined child would not be at peace, though it rested upon a mother's breast. The unbelieving spirit would see no joyous light, and feel no thrills of praise, even though it were admitted into the glorious courts of heaven.

Yet, while we renounce this gloomy view of life, and are not to consider ourselves "strangers and pilgrims" in a sense which implies that there can be no true home for us here, there is another view in which this life, the life of every man, is a pilgrimage. In one sense,

the expression "strangers and pilgrims" describes the necessary conditions, and the certain course, of our present existence. This must be so through our inward experience, and in consequence of outward changes. Observe this fact; and then look at its compensations, and at the lesson which it enforces, and the duty which it enjoins.

Life is a pilgrimage in the necessary development of its successive stages, and in the changing views with which every thing must be regarded in these successive periods. We journey out of childhood and its vague dreams, into youth with its bright hopes, onward through maturer life, with its sharp struggles, into age with its calmer and more disciplined spirit. We must leave the life of one period as the next opens, and enter into feelings, thoughts, and aims, that are as different from those which we once possessed, as if they belonged to different worlds. Childhood, youth, manhood, age! This life cannot be the same, neither can any view of it be the same, in these successive periods. Have you never questioned your own identity when you recalled the feelings in which you once lived; feelings as diverse from those which control you to-day as if they had belonged to the life of a different soul? Recall, for a moment, the visions of childhood, when the world seemed to bloom with unfading flowers; fair as Eden itself when Adam and Eve looked upon its beauty with still innocent hearts,—and remember the fresh gladness of that experience. Recall the life of youth, with its bounding hopes, its glorious dreams, its splendid castles in the air, that seemed as the substantial prophecies of future success. Consider the

experience of manhood as it moved, possibly, racked, by the struggle of strong passions; as it toils on and labors for a content which it never fully wins. Look onward to age. Sometimes it sinks into imbecility. But, sometimes, it attains a divine strength and peace, because the passions are subdued, and the reconciliation is accomplished, and the soul, with the vision of faith, beholds the crowd of shining spirits already waving their wings to welcome it into the opening heavens. The world, even nature itself, wears a different aspect to feelings so entirely different. It must be so in all great variations of our life. How different is this world to conscious guilt when it feels the torture of the inward, unquenchable fire, and to penitence when it receives the Father's forgiving kiss! It becomes a hell or a heaven, to such different states of mind. We do not distinctly perceive each step in these spiritual changes; yet we are surely carried forward, and, part by part, the world of feeling in which youth lived is taken down, and the world of deeper experience built up in its stead. Even in the life of Jesus we mark these different stages of spiritual development. Even to him the world must have assumed new aspects in successive periods; in his childhood when he conversed with the doctors; in the years of profound thought between that conversation and his baptism; in the unfathomable suffering of Gethsemane; in the hour of crucifixion, with its prayer of forgiveness and of peace. We may gain a higher content or be entirely faithless. But we must leave the joy of early days behind us—for we are pilgrims into new, and ever new experiences. By the fixed conditions of our

existence we must pass on to those to which we have hitherto been strangers. The simple statement awakens solemn thoughts. How can man speak upon such a theme as this, except in lowly confessions? I have known the truth of these representations. A glad, hopeful youth, and a struggling manhood, with a spirit not yet disciplined to reconciliation, I have known. I have realized how differently life looks from the two positions. May the All-merciful Father send me down, at length, the angel of his peace!

But, again. Life is a pilgrimage, and we are strangers and pilgrims here, not only because our feelings change, and the world therefore seems different, but also because the scenes around us change, and are really different. We do not remain the same. Neither does the world remain the same. Let us take for our principal illustration what will be felt in the greatest number of human hearts. What is our course but a journey amidst slowly, yet constantly, changing relationships and homes! We are associated with continually varying groups of men. The companions around us now are not those with whom we began our course. They are scattered among changed associates, or have already entered the invisible world. We miss the once familiar, and most cherished voices. We have witnessed the departure of beloved forms. Teachers to whom we formerly listened are gone, and others occupy their places. How changed the groups! Not in two successive years, scarcely in two successive months, are they the same! Where are the well known faces upon which we looked but a few years ago? Think of the departed, the ascended, who were standing then in the

places that you are filling now! Think of those who were then by your side in so many of your homes! Think of the homes that have entirely ceased to exist! Think of the relations that have been formed, and the connections that have been severed! Think of the changes among the living! Remember the great, the increasing company of the dead! Is not life a pilgrimage? Let all human hearts answer out of their sorrow, amidst their memories of life's deep experience. Are we not "strangers and pilgrims?" For do we behold any thing really permanent, any thing except changing homes, in which we bid farewell, one by one, to those who have been associated with us here, and are introduced to others, who were once comparatively, or wholly unknown? We call those pilgrims who have already gone from the world; who have journeyed from present relations into new companionships in the unseen sphere. But they are not more truly pilgrims than are we, even here. They bid farewell to their associates in the present world. But to whom do they go? Perhaps to many spirits known before. In age, they go to the scenes in which all who have been most deeply loved already dwell. Death is the renewal of old acquaintanceships, as well as an introduction into new associations. It is only a peculiar, and an especially impressive illustration of the law which makes us pilgrims and strangers now, as well as when we are called to journey onward into an unknown world.

It is easy to accumulate other and different illustrations. Life is a pilgrimage because we are led to new and varying duties in its flying years. We scarcely find ourselves at home in present duties, before we are

called to meet those to which we have been strangers. Even the truest men can scarcely meet old responsibilities before new ones press upon them. One call of truth or one demand of society can scarcely be heard, before another comes to modify, or change, our action. Each noble Christian effort in the heart, or in the world, opens the way for another, and gives the power for its accomplishment. We are, and must be, "strangers and pilgrims" forever. We are pilgrims to new realms of truth; to new heights of holiness. The whole world is on its pilgrimage from the rude spirit of the earliest ages towards the far distant day of Christian life. It is easy to fill the picture whose outlines we have merely traced. Indeed, experience fills it out in the life of every heart, in colors far more vivid, and in shades far more deep, than human speech can give it.

And what are the compensations for this inevitable condition of present life? There are many and great compensations. It is good to form intimate relationships with various minds, and receive the varied power which they can impart. We need many teachers; not one alone. Each presents the truth from some peculiar point of view. The instruction will be imperfect without them all. Indeed, it seems to be the mission of every man, and it is the chosen work of every great man, to unfold some single, important truth. We become narrow minded unless we listen to various instructors and have enlarged companionships. The spirit of Jesus is not fully displayed in the exposition of any single sect among his disciples. We need the teaching which other sects can give, as well as that which is to be found in our own. Each company of

disciples may manifest a particular ray in the Saviour's crown of light. We need the brightness in every separate church to make up its perfect glory. We need to know what different minds have learned, and thought, as they studied truth and life from different points of view; to know the experience of various hearts in the discipline of the world. We need to know the experience of those who are now in the great company of the departed; to commune with the spirits of ascended disciples; with prophets and martyrs who have gone to look with unsealed eyes upon the perfect revelations of the Father's love, and "to see him as he is." What words of inspiration such teachers may speak! They cannot return to the earth to instruct us here. Let us cheerfully become pilgrims and go to them.

And how can we be brought into close communion with various minds except by a series of changing relationships? It is good to look upon various scenes of natural beauty, the grandeur of mountain and ocean, of earth and sky. Each scene impresses some peculiar thought of the infinite power and love; and their united teaching enlarges our conception of the Father's goodness and character. It is immeasurably more important to commune with a variety of minds; the mind of great thought that towers upward with a mountain majesty; the man of profound affections, with a heart deep as the unfathomable sea; the calm and gentle spirit, peaceful as the fair and quiet landscape. It is better to know them all. We should be confined to one mind, or to one class of minds, if we were not placed in constantly changing scenes and homes. The

shock that severs us from present associations will waken us to a new form of life with its new instructions. We must be pilgrims whenever we look beyond the horizon that bounds our present prospect. We must welcome new minds if we will receive thoughts beyond those which we have already gained. The Father knew what was best ; and, therefore, he made his children strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.

There are compensations for this condition of a pilgrimage in which man is placed. We are not presenting a cold and philosophical view of that condition, or of those changes in human relationships that rack the soul. We shrink from all merely philosophic views of any thing that touches the deepest affections of the heart. We turn, chilled and shivering, from icy speculations. We are striving to look, and to speak, from the mountain summit of the Christian faith. When we reflect upon themes like this, we sometimes overlook the vast capacities of the human soul. We need not forget the vanished scenes, when new ones open. Each grand scene of natural beauty that we have witnessed may be distinct in memory now. We do not forget the glory of the cataract, when we look upon the mountain, or the beauty of either when we gaze upon the sea. The experience of the soul, in this respect, is like that of the man who hangs new pictures upon the walls of his dwelling in a true love of their beauty. The more his taste is developed by culture, the more he appreciates every work of art which he formerly possessed. There is room in the human heart for new friendships. It gains new strength as its love flows out the more, and both the old and the new affection may be deeper,

purser, than the first alone. There is room in the human heart. I look up to the spiritual world for my most perfect illustration. I do not suppose that true hearts cease to beat for us when they enter the new, the living associations of the heavenly state, the true marriage feast. Those new associations impart a deeper life, and they look upon us now with an affection unknown on earth. The sea of affection has deepened, and pours into every channel a fuller stream. Thus it must be in the eternal pilgrimage of our existence. The more true relationships we form, the purer and deeper each will become. There is room in the human heart. There is room for all; for the pure friendships of earth; for the spiritual relationships of heaven; for the profound reverence and love of pure discipleship towards the Saviour ever-blessed; for the supreme adoration of the infinite Father. We do not forget, or lose, old objects of affection by being strangers and pilgrims. Rather do we take them all with us, to be forever revered and loved in the many mansions of the soul.

The great, the unlearned lesson in experience is, to live in the world, and yet above it; to be at home in present action, and present ties, and yet be able to pass on into new relationships when the summons comes. We can learn the lesson in our pilgrimage through different scenes in nature. We can give ourselves up to the beauty of what we behold to-day, and yet be ready to journey on to other scenes to-morrow. Even then, indeed, we sometimes look back with lingering eyes for another, and yet another view of what we are leaving now. But it is more difficult to learn the lesson

in our pilgrimage through the changing scenes of life. Even Jesus looked back in lingering affection when he bade his disciples farewell, although he went forward in obedience to the distinct voice of God. We must throw ourselves into present duties and associations, or they can do nothing for us. As the scholar must give an undivided thought to each daily lesson in order to gain its instruction, so we are called to an absolute devotion to each true tie of existence. We must make our hearts one with the hearts that are around us in order to receive the depth of their life. Yet we must be above such bonds also, or the changes of life will leave us homeless and perishing. Solve that problem; to be at home where we are, and to be pilgrims too; to be at rest with the loved while they are here, and yet, peacefully, to let them go; to extract the utmost sweetness and joy from each relationship of human affection, and yet not to be overwhelmed as each in turn is broken. This is the problem of life;—to dwell in the world, awake to every duty, responding to every sympathy, and yet to dwell all the while in heaven, as Jesus reposed in the home at Bethany while he dwelt also in the bosom of his God. Then can we be pilgrims, without a word of murmuring as we journey on, because the felt presence of the Father will build for us a true home everywhere. I can only announce that bright, that distant state of triumphant rest, and pray with you, and for myself, that we may yet know its perfect peace.

JULY 16, 1848.

IX.

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES.



A CLOUD OF WITNESSES.—Hebrews xii. 1.

THE writer applies this expression to the faithful who had lived before his day. He represents them as a cloud of sympathizing witnesses, compassing the believers about while they ran their own appointed race. And he speaks as if the memory of their examples, and the consciousness of their presence, must become a powerful impulse to a similar fidelity.

“A cloud of witnesses.” No thoughtful person can fail to perceive how rapidly we are becoming connected with the dead by the successive departures of those whom we have known and loved from the circles of society and friendship. Singly they take their flight,—the friend, the parent, the child; and so gradually they appear to go, that we do not realize how many are already gathered in the unseen world. But when we ask, “Where is that once unbroken company of friends and kindred?” we see that the number of the

departed may be as great as the number who remain. Even in youth this experience is felt; and as years increase, and especially as age approaches, the witnesses encompass us like a cloud. We hear not only a single household voice which once spoke to us on earth, and which now speaks from the skies. A throng is already there; and their silent, but united testimony and invitation may have as great a power over our hearts, at certain moments, as the voices of love which still salute our ear in the companionships of the world.

It is a sure, and yet a blessed process, which the course of years is carrying onward. It is blessed, though it can only be advanced amidst many tears, and through an anguish as keen as the pangs of dissolution. For these rapidly increasing companies of the loved in the spiritual world are bearing most glorious testimonies to the thoughtful soul. Let us meditate for a moment upon those testimonies.

In the first place, the unseen world becomes more distinct as the cherished and the loved pass into its invisible mansions. It is delightful indeed to observe how direct is the tendency of such departures, to build up a clear and undying faith. The spiritual world is no longer a land of shadows when loved and cherished friends have gone to dwell there; and in proportion as such witnesses increase, it will appear like a great reality to the soul. It cannot be shadowy then. We know its inhabitants. Familiar voices are speaking there. Well known feet are busy in its blessed ministries. Hearts whose deeper life has been manifested to our eyes throb there unchanged, except as their

earthly graces have brightened into a heavenly glory. The spiritual world must thus become distinct and clear to the soul as the company of the departed increases. For what is its nature? It is not a scene of outward glory which is too dazzling for our earthly eyes. It consists of the thoughts, the hopes, the life of the hearts that are gathered there. And when their life has been known in the previous intercourse of the present world the divine reality is partially unveiled. We cannot look upon the full brightness of the light around the throne. Yet some of the rays which enter into that glory have beamed across our pathway here. Its nature we know, though its fulness heart hath not conceived. And we need the revelations which come through this experience. Words of instruction alone, even though they are the words of Jesus, do not impart this clear, undying faith. The departure of the loved unfolds their meaning, and makes the hope and the life of the resurrection plain. An infinitely gracious Providence, through the defeat of mortal hopes, unfolds the assurance of immortality. Each bereavement removes another film from our blinded eyes. The conquests of death quicken the faith which takes away its sting. The apparent victories of the grave destroy its triumph. What can they do except to increase the cloud of witnesses who compass us about?

But these encompassing witnesses bear still another testimony. They not only make the spiritual world a reality to our thought; but they invest it with new and enduring charms. It becomes beautiful to the heart as it becomes clearer to the mind. Who are gathering there as this bereaving Providence goes onward? Most

familiar friends, objects of household tenderness, parents, children, all of the loved are going. And as their presence on earth gave to life its dearest joy, so now, their presence in the spiritual world invests the state beyond the tomb with the same attraction. In well remembered tones of love they seem to say, "Come up hither to dwell again with us." If it is home to dwell with those to whom the heart clings, how surely, and how rapidly, homes are building for us there! The cloud of witnesses is gathering. We are not torn away from present friends to be transferred to a land of strangers, where we shall wander like exiles from our native soil. We are only passing from our home below to our home above; to a home in which those who are left behind will soon come to dwell. As the new-born child is received into the arms of love which wait to bless it, so is the new-born soul welcomed and blessed in that higher world. And a still better welcome may await that better birth. For the spirit may not be unconscious of the love which receives it, as at the beginning of earthly life. The spirit new born into heaven may recognize the voice of welcome that it most loved to hear on earth, and respond to the full joy of that angel soul. It may be as if the infant here could instantly share the first full rapture of the mother's heart. Remember this gathering cloud of witnesses. Do you think only of sorrow when the tolling bell speaks of another removal from the circles of love? We know how bereaved friends must weep over the tomb in which the loved are laid. Yet do not clothe these temporary bereavements with unmingled gloom. The cloud which veils the sun from our eyes while we are

standing in the valley, becomes radiant with glory when seen from the mountain top. Observe the light which attends these changes. Through them Providence gently smooths the way before our own feet, and builds a home in which our hearts can rest before it summons us also to depart. And the more frequent these bereavements, the more beautiful is that home. How dear is the promise of Jesus to the sorrowing disciples just before his departure, — “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” And is it irreverent to think that all the loved and honored who depart from us are going to prepare a place, a home for us? And when that place is thus prepared, the touch of the angel of death to our own dying lips is but the kiss of welcome to that eternal home.

It requires but a few years of intimate connection with any circles of friendship to impress these thoughts with an almost inexpressible power. From how many vacant places friends have already gone, to become a part of that encompassing cloud of witnesses! What beautiful ascensions have blessed our eyes as the departing went up into heaven! How rapidly the homes above are building for us all! It is good to meditate upon that growing company; to hear their testimonies of endurance and of trust, of love and hope. It is good to attempt to distinguish the various and attractive forms of those who are in that ever-increasing cloud. There are infant forms from so many of our homes. And they are no more pale and cold, “but clothed in a deathless bloom.” They are tried by pain no more;

but they sing "a song which only the hosts of heaven can hear." And by their testimonies to an immortal life, they minister to the parent now as the parent could not have ministered to the child. There are those of maturer years; taken in the fulness of manly strength, or from the fondest services of affection; from earth's nearest, noblest, and most beautiful relationships. There are those of many days, who were venerable for wisdom and for years,—the last honored members of a departed generation. They speak in the memories of almost every dwelling; in the experience, nearer or more remote, of almost every human heart. Think of these messengers of the resurrection, these ascended friends, whose departures have taken away charm after charm from the earth to make the heavens more bright. To whom have not their messages been sent? Who is not encompassed with their heavenly ministries?

And not these alone are in the heavens to make them more beautiful to our faith and love. There are the servants of truth and holiness of every age, whose countenances we never beheld, but whose souls we have known, and whose words have been to us like a breath of inspiration. There are the martyrs who died to win the inheritance of truth and of freedom in which we rejoice; the prophets and the apostles of elder and of later days. There is the great Church of the Living God—the Church triumphant now. And there, amidst the shining band, the Saviour forever dwells.

Lift up your tearful eyes, ye children of sadness, and behold that great cloud of witnesses! Look up to

Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith;" at once its source, and its end. The Providence which is rapidly connecting us with the unseen world as closely as with the present, when viewed with earthly eyes, may seem to be only a succession of bitter separations. But, to the trusting heart, it brings ever brightening and more joyful revelations. It hallows the earth as it opens the heavens. How blessed is the testimony which these witnesses leave behind! How they consecrate this world by their memories! How strong and how tender the associations with the homes where they have dwelt! The place where their feet have rested seems hallowed ground. The dwellings where those most dear have lived, and suffered, and died, are transfigured. A more than earthly light shines around them. They become like temples in which a spiritual presence ever seems to dwell. How eloquent a thousand homes to those who have dwelt within them! There they have known the deepest joy. There they have poured out the tears of sorrow. There they have offered the prayers of trial and of trust. There the departed have lived and loved. There the cold forms of the beloved dead were laid. No spots where world-honored genius once lived, where the most heavenly piety watched and prayed, are holier than these lowly dwellings to those who have there known and felt the intense experiences of life. And if haply the meek spirit of reconciliation has there breathed its life away—a spirit as pure as that of the apostle or the martyr, though all unknown to the world—few ministries in God's Providence can possess a greater power. The world is hallowed by such memories. Our dwellings

are rapidly clothed with such associations. The dead have been in them all, or shall quickly be. And to earnest and thoughtful souls, a voice often comes from places thus consecrated which seems to bid them put off their shoes in reverence, because it is holy ground.

How these witnesses testify to us again, in the impression of their lives! It is interesting to see how the character of those whom we have loved or honored, when their work on earth is ended, concentrates itself into the idea, and the memory, of some one grand quality, which is most true to their prevailing life. The name of one becomes another word for patient endurance, or devoted love of truth, or self-sacrificing philanthropy, or a lion, yet lamb-like courage; while the name of the child remains as the bright and unfading image of innocence. Each stands for some special virtue when life is closed and the impression is complete. Each becomes fixed as an unfading star in our memory. So do the great names of the past arrange themselves in the memory of succeeding generations, as symbols of the grand and noble qualities which may exist in human nature. The name of Howard is another word for philanthropy. The word Pilgrim is fast becoming a synonym for Christian heroism. Humanity canonizes its truly glorious children, and exalts them into saints to represent great spiritual qualities to future ages. Honored and loved as men may be, they seldom exert their deepest influence until they die. Death not only invests the pure with a heavenly, an immortal crown. It is their earthly coronation also. A thousand misconceptions may often attend living excellence. We do not yield it a fitting reverence while it stands

by our side. But the dead truly begin to live in the better judgment, in the reverent feeling, of human hearts. When they leave the earth they begin to exert their noblest influence. When Jesus went away the Comforter came.

But not only do these witnesses consecrate this world by their memory and their virtues. Not only do they render the spiritual world more distinct to the mind, and more attractive to the heart, in those ways which we have already noticed. The souls of the holy departed are represented not merely as quickening the faithful by their memories, but as invisible, yet assisting angels, present with them in their earthly pilgrimage. The heart always inclines to accept such a statement as the expression of its faith. If the earthly life has been a quickening, spiritual ministry, we can scarcely question the continuance of that ministry when this life is ended. A miraculous opening of the heavens, revealing Jesus to our eyes as he wondrously appeared to the disciples in Judea, could scarcely make the heart more confident that "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." We feel that whosoever *liveth*, shall never die. The testimony of the cloud of witnesses shall never fail. The departed child, whose "angel always beholds the face of the Father," whose soul was never clouded by sin, may now be sitting in the midst of us, like the child whom Jesus once placed in the midst of his disciples, to reveal to the heart the spirit of heaven. Perhaps it is near us to whisper messages from the Father more directly to the soul. Every spirit whose earthly life was spent in devotion to truth, every friend who rejoiced to speak quickening words to our

souls, may be walking with us in the way. And now it may cause our hearts to burn within us by opening to us the deep things of God, though as with the disciples of old when Jesus joined them, our eyes are holden that we see it not.

We cherish this deep and almost irresistible persuasion of the heart. It may not be wise, perhaps, to seek consolation by resting upon such a solace. The true consolation is obtained in that unquestioning trust which believes although no ray of light appears. It comes from that confidence which transcends all speculation, and knows that no heart of man can conceive of the boundless love of the Father. Nevertheless, we still cherish the thought. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." And these deep persuasions which spontaneously arise within it, which no logic can refute, appear to be sealed with the testimony of God. The spiritual world which is ever taking to itself the joy of our life, may still be in our midst. When Jesus shall touch our eyes we may open them at once upon its now invisible scenes. The bonds of love that once connected us with the departed in visible communion, are not severed, but strengthened, as they vanish from our sight. God, who makes all things his angels, forever sends out the spirits of the pure with revelations of his will. Indeed, to those ascended spirits, no joy could seem more heavenly than the performance of such errands of grace. The earth is covered with the ashes of the departed. We cannot step without treading upon traces of their earthly life. And we are compassed about by their present spirits. They speak to us, it may be, while we wake, and while we sleep. They whisper

thoughts of encouragement in our hours of weakness. They speak no longer in imperfect words, as when here at our side, but in clear revelations. There are a thousand avenues whereby their voices may find entrance to the soul. The departed mother may be one of the angels who watch over the child. The ascended child may come with consolations to the weeping mother. And while we linger at the tomb of the loved, whither we have gone to embalm them anew in our memory, they may be standing as it were behind us, as the risen Jesus stood behind Mary at the sepulchre. They do not call us by name, and reveal their presence as Jesus revealed himself to Mary. Yet they may whisper words within our hearts, which bid us turn and follow them in the bright path of their ascension.

The cloud of witnesses. They make the spiritual world real to the mind and heart. They hallow this world by their memories and their purity. They speak from the heavens as all-encompassing angels. They leave a glorious testimony on the earth, and, as we rejoice to repeat, they utter a more glorious testimony from their higher dwelling-place. We mourn over these repeated bereavements. Yet, even now, we scarcely begin to receive their instructions. And we deeply need their teachings. How bright and lovely these ascended spirits make the unseen world! Ye honored ones who have departed, ye goodly fellowship of friends who have gone in holy trust, ye beloved forms who have left us in infant innocence, or with the seal of the Christian's victory, the adoption of sons, upon the forehead, — how does the gulf between the present and the future narrow as ye go! How the

heart overcomes its apprehensions when it meditates upon those who are building a home for us, as they gather in that immortal company! Ye heavenly witnesses, the cloud of shining ones,—compass us about with your holy memories; with the testimonies of your devoted lives and victorious deaths; with the ministries which are still permitted you in the Father's Providence. Compass us about, that we may “run with patience the race that is set before us,” until we are taken into your bright companionship, into the pure and eternal fellowship of the redeemed.

OCTOBER 1, 1843.

X.

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF LIFE AND DEATH.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST; TO DIE IS GAIN. — Philippians i. 21.

THE text is one of the most remarkable declarations of the great Apostle. Perhaps no single sentence in his writings combines so many elements of noble thought, or expresses so divine a trust. We find numerous statements of a similar feeling in respect to death, many words equally full of immortal hope. We read his triumphant exclamations concerning the lost sting of death — the lost victory of the grave. We find numerous expressions of the *present peace* which attends a heavenly life, even while he bewails the bitter contests with his own unsubdued passions, and is keenly alive to the pains of his varied persecutions. We often behold the gushings of pure joy from the well of living waters, the deep fountains of faith and love in his breast. But in the single sentence selected as the text, he affirms that the true heart is conqueror in life and

death alike. He triumphantly declares that it makes the present and the future equally glorious; so that "To live is Christ"—that one word expressive of all hope and blessedness to the disciples' hearts, and "To die is gain"—the unutterable joy of his nearer presence still.

The text is still more impressive when we remember the circumstances amidst which the Apostle was placed. This note of triumph was struck in a prison. Paul was writing while burdened with bonds. And even the release of which he intimates a hope, though it would allow him to return to his loved field of duty, would lead him into dangers from which imprisonment was a protection. Men magnify the joy of immortality when the present is beset with difficulties. They paint the future in brighter hues as darkness gathers round them. It would be natural for the imprisoned Apostle, bruised with rods, scarred by stripes, in peril of martyrdom every hour, to exclaim, "To die is gain." But when he says at the same moment, "To live is Christ," when he neither darkens the present, nor magnifies the future, in consequence of his present trials, he ascends to the sublimity of trust. We then perceive how deep must be the peace which Jesus bequeathed to the true disciple's heart. We find the comment upon Paul's own words when he says—"Neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God." We begin to apprehend what Jesus means when he says, "He that liveth and believeth on me, shall never die."

"To live is Christ; to die is gain." It is difficult to say whether the Christian view of life, or its view of

death, is most attractive and inspiring. We are accustomed to speak of the victory over death as its crowning blessing. But the victory in life of which it speaks has a wondrous glory too. I scarcely know which receives the brighter transfiguration through the spirit in which Jesus teaches us to regard them. As we follow Jesus in our imagination from his deserted sepulchre, the life beyond the grave seems glorious indeed. It is to sit at the right hand of the Father in a closeness of communion which no earthly image can illustrate. Yet, when Jesus talked with Nicodemus, he spoke of himself as “the Son of man who *is* in heaven.” And the love in which he pleaded with men in Samaria and Galilee, is the same love in which he makes his eternal intercessions for us. The death, the resurrection, of Jesus are scarcely brighter than his life. Before he went down to the grave, he breathed the same love which he manifested when he re-appeared to Peter, and Thomas, and the eleven, after his crucifixion. The ascending Saviour is scarcely more lovely, more glorious, or more divine, than the Saviour praying that his murderers may be forgiven. That prayer of forgiveness upon the cross expressed an inward peace as sweet as aught which risen spirits may know. We go to the tomb whence the stone was rolled away, to say, “He is risen;” and thus intimate the assured hope of the whole race of dying men. But we follow his steps on the earth, to see, even here, a risen, immortal life. And when he speaks, or performs a miracle of love, and reveals the deep things in his heart, we behold what a divine thing it may be to live, as well as what a blessed thing it may be to die. The robe of death

and the garments of life alike receive a transfiguration, and become "white as the light."

Indeed Christianity rebukes the twofold error which is so common in our views of life and death. It rebukes the feeling which makes death so terrible that all our lifetime we are subject to bondage through fear. It rebukes the old philosophy which called the body the prison of the soul, and present existence a continued bondage; and the prevalent feeling which depreciates the world, or regards it as a vale of tears. According to Christianity, life and death are twin children of the same love; and present and future being are only different parts of the same whole. Between those parts, death interpose no seam. Life is like a continuous stream. It grows wider, deeper, more beautiful, until it flows at length amidst "fields of living green" and "never withering flowers." In part of its course it is within, and in part beyond, our sight. Yet the stream is still the same. Christianity does indeed say, "To die is gain." It speaks of unconceived glories that are yet to be revealed. But it also says of him who hath an obedient heart, "The Father and the Son make their abode with him." The future glory which it reveals shines back upon the present. The morning dawn of our existence is illuminated by the brighter glory of that perfect day. The Christian ideas of present and future life react upon each other. Each is to give to the conception of the other a still greater charm. The love which we imagine will appear in visible brightness in worlds beyond the grave, is upon this side of the tomb also, and pours its light and its blessings upon every child. And the love which we

now behold is a bright hint to aid our conception of the paradise which it hides. In the Edens of affection here, the soul hears whispers of the glory which is hereafter to be proclaimed. The full fountains of love above are only deeper springs of the same joy which already flows in trusting hearts. God never hides himself from those who are prepared to see him. And there is but one law whereby his love can be known, on earth, or in heaven. The pure in heart see him both here and there. They see him in the sweet conviction of his changeless love ; in the consciousness of being folded in his everlasting arms. "To die is gain." But "to live is Christ," though it be to live amidst perils, and persecutions, and bonds. In both states we are in the same temple. Here, we are in the outer court. Hereafter, we may lift the veil before the Holy of Holies. Christianity declares a twofold triumph. And its triumph over the tomb is scarcely greater than its triumph over an opposing and a fleeting world.

"To live is Christ ; to die is gain." It is difficult to maintain this glorified thought respecting both the present and the future amidst all the changes of actual life. The fact that Paul maintained it, or rather that it broke forth spontaneously from his heart, amid the perils of his way, is what most exalts him in our reverence. It is hard thus to regard life in its actual conflicts, its repeated calls to grief. It is difficult to prevent clouds from covering us with gloom, and tears from blinding our eyes to the brightness of earth. I think not only of imaginary changes, but of the trials which Providence actually sends. And a triumph over them all appears like an attainment almost be-

yond the power of the soul, although Jesus distinctly calls us to gain it. I see a home, which, in three brief years is changed from the glad abode of youthful strength and beauty, and doting parental pride, into a place of utter loneliness. First, one fair and beautiful droops and fades away. Then another bright in youthful genius, whose life seemed a promise to the world, also departs; and it is a childless home. And next, mid clouds of grief which deepen into a gloom that the spirit cannot bear, the heart-strings of a parent are worn asunder, and he is laid by his children's side. Three years bereave one hearth-stone to fill three such graves. Or I see other homes from which two, or three, in childhood's loveliness, pass down to the tomb in quick succession; homes to which the mourners come back from the grave, only to return again, to lay a new treasure in the silent dust. Yet why should I speak of scenes which I have witnessed rather than appeal to similar experiences which at times are felt by every human heart? As life has been unrolled to view, who has not known such wounded hearts and stricken homes? How many have dwelt within such homes, and realized the bitterness of such sorrows! How many have found it true that the anguish which is felt there is keener than that which imagination could picture! It may be easy for those to speak of the brightness of life who do not miss the most cheerful voices, who do not think of occupied graves when they ask where their children are. But what is it to speak thus when life becomes a lingering crucifixion of affection? It is easy then to say, "To die is gain." For those whose presence made this world our home are fast gathering beyond

the tomb, and the heart yearns to renew these interrupted fellowships of affection. But to say also with equal fervor — “To live is Christ” — to realize amidst the experience of his trial or his Cross, the unutterable peace of Jesus, and to look up from outward loneliness to say, “I am not alone, because the Father is with me” — is a more difficult, and a nobler victory. Then there can be no more pain. Neither shall “there be any more sea.”

It is often more difficult for us to submit to the discipline of life than to cherish bright thoughts respecting death. We call it the great triumph to attain cheerful views of death. But we can often look with composure upon death when we cannot clothe life with glory. There is much of apparent resignation, of seeming trust, which does not argue a genuine submission, or a true faith. It may even prove the want of true acquiescence in the ordinations of God. It is easier to think brightly of a state in which there are no separations than to make a desolate home glad. When exhausted by pain, it is easier to dwell upon a state of exemption from suffering, than to make the time of suffering a time of peace. This readiness to go, which we so often find, is sometimes the weariness of weakness rather than the triumph of the soul. I can imagine another state which I should long to enter more easily than I can clothe the present with beauty. Indeed, man always longs for some change in his condition, or in his duties. He fancies that it is the shadow of surrounding circumstances, rather than the shadow of his own discontent, which darkens his path. Man may rightly say, in bounding hope, “To die is gain.” Paul said that even

when life seemed to him most truly glorious. And Jesus said, when his cross was building, "I have glorified Thee on earth ; and now, Father, glorify Thou me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." Man may rightly say, "To die is gain." Heart hath not conceived the gain which it brings to all who love God. We were made to die. This fact alone is proof that "to die is gain." But we are to distrust the spirit which does not also say — "To live is Christ." Christianity does not sympathize with the feeling that fastens its desires upon one condition of our being alone, while it constantly depreciates the other. It will not suffer bright hopes for the future to be built upon present despondency. There are many to whom I would not say — Seek a victory over death and the tomb — but rather, Seek first a victory over life. "Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness," "and all things needful else shall be added." The spirit which triumphs in life will have power to make the face of death like the face of an angel.

We have spoken of the necessity of cherishing bright views of both the present and the future, and of the fact that the feeling which glorifies the one, and depreciates the other, is to be distrusted. There is greater reason for this distrust than we at first imagine. The true faith in immortality *must* make the present bright, as well as the future glorious. According to the Christian doctrine, immortality is not simply the continuation of existence beyond the grave, but the possession of immortal powers and affections which are awakened here by the revelations of truth, and the manifestations of infinite love. Christianity teaches that man has a

soul which is now to be fed by the living bread which comes down from heaven. If the joy of immortality consists in the future development of this undying soul, its present infant progress must bring a foretaste of that bliss. If it be a gain to die, it is because the soul possesses an inward life which must make it Christ to live. The true faith represents both conditions as beautiful, because they are only different scenes in which the same spirit dwells. Jesus does not give the promise of immortality as a consolation to slumbering hearts. His teaching is, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." The inward life of which he spoke must scatter fragrance and beauty around all its paths, whether they lead into the scenes of present existence or across the narrow sea of death. Its treasure is in heaven. But its heaven is in the soul; and its peace is like the peace of the Redeemer. It is an attribute of its own nature, and remains with it wherever it dwells. The true life is like the sun—a source of brightness in itself. It was not strange that Paul should speak at the same time of life as a triumph, and of death as gain. He could not have done otherwise. The spirit which dispelled every fear of the future overcame every difficulty of the present. We can never rightly say, "O death where is thy sting?" without saying at the same moment, "To live is Christ." It is not strange that rapturous expressions of inward peace have been uttered by the martyr's lips, or poured out in song from the midnight prison. To those who know the deep things of the love of God, life reveals its divinest peace amidst its greatest suffering. Thus have those to whom life seemed the saddest often found it

sweetest. Thus do the most fervent expressions of love to God often go up from most desolate homes. God does not keep the gates of heaven closed till the portals of the tomb have been passed, that he may open them suddenly to reveal a splendor wholly unconceived and unknown before. Heaven dawns here upon loving hearts. It gradually brightens like the morning light. Those who are prepared to enter it find intervals of its peace amidst the heaviest trials. And though there is now an element of sadness in their song which a clearer vision shall dispel, yet are they learning even here the glad strains of the world of unbroken harmony and peace.

Our chief want is a true faith in immortal life. We do not mean the faith which merely believes in a resurrection, or which goes to the Redeemer's tomb in the assurance that he is risen, and that all of human race shall also rise. This alone avails nothing for this world, or the world to come. We need the faith which raises us now into heavenly thoughts and heavenly places with the Lord, and which fills the soul with immortality. With such a faith we should enter into the twofold hope which is expressed in the Apostle's words. We should feel the wounds of bereavement; but we should also receive the balm which is poured in to heal them. We should suffer the agony of the cross; but we should find the peace which passes understanding. Let man prove himself by this twofold trial. Let him not speak of reconciliation to death when there is unreconciliation in his life. Let him question his content in life, when he trembles at the thought of death. Unless he sees both to be beautiful he sees neither rightly.

The bow of hope is not to hang over the future only, however trying the present may be. It must comprehend time, death, eternity, in its embrace. No flood can overwhelm us while that is stretched over our way. It is an almost divine peace which we have been contemplating. Yet it may be known even here. It will not come at a sudden call. The heart that has no inward trust must not expect to realize it when smitten by grief. Yet it will come through constant seeking. And when it is Christ to live, it will doubtless be gain to die. And let us never forget, that when it shall be gain for us to die, it must also be Christ for us to live.

MAY 11, 1845.

XI.

THE DEATH OF THE YOUNG.

IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MEN ONCE TO DIE. — Hebrews, ix. 37.

THE text most naturally suggests the consideration of the law of death in its general application to man. And it would be necessary to reflect long upon it in order to dispel the dark views that cluster around it, and to enter into the bright teaching of the Christian faith. The text represents death as an appointment; that is to say, a universal law. And what can any universal law of a paternal Providence be but a great provision of love, whose benediction is designed to rest upon every head? But although this conclusion seems so irresistible, it may be practically powerless. When shall we gain the faith which can see the same love manifested in this as in every other law of Providence. When shall we practically regard this appointment, by which every birth becomes the prophecy of another death, and every rising of the sun of present existence the sure precursor of its speedy setting amid sadness

and tears — when shall we regard this as only a nobler birth? Death has no peculiar sting. “The sting of death is sin;” the sin which covers life and death alike with gloom, and haunts the soul with prophecies of retribution.

We turn aside, however, from this general topic to a more limited theme. To all, the law of death is a mystery. Yet it wears a different aspect when it comes in different periods of life. We may not understand why our earthly existence should be destined so quickly to cease. There are numberless instructions which are unexhausted during the longest life. We may, indeed, regard this wealth of wisdom beyond what man can gather as an assurance, and a symbol of the infinity of mercy behind the cloud. Still we do not see why the mind could not progress here for ages. Yet, when death comes to the aged, burdened by infirmity, it is easy to regard it as an angel sent to rescue the soul from the ruins of its present dwelling, and to lead it to a new and more fitting mansion in the Father’s house. But when it comes to the child, or when it comes to the young, who, with joyous heart, and bounding feet, are ready to enter upon the course of active life, who are like beautiful columns in the circles of love around which so many clinging affections and thrilling hopes are entwined, the great mystery wears to most a surpassing strangeness. Then the course of nature seems rudely broken by an alien hand. We know not how to regard this as an appointment of God. If the trees of life could remain until they had produced their natural and perfect fruit, we might look calmly upon their decay. But when they fall just as the full beauty

of their blossom gives promise of the fairest fruit, or when, as with the trees of milder climes, we behold at once the opening bud and the ripened fruit,—the present grace of character, and the bright promise of still higher excellence,—it is an inscrutable mystery indeed. What missions seem to be assigned them here? How many in their weakness, rest upon such for support, and lean upon those who once leaned upon them. The death of infants seems far less strange. They alight upon the earth for a moment, and straightway return to God. They are messengers sent to open the invisible world to the soul as it follows them in their ascending flight, rather than to gain a citizenship in the dwelling-places of men. But when the brightest hopes are almost realized, and then suddenly disappointed, when we taste the cup of joy and then find it dashed from our lips, Providence appears doubly mysterious and demands the deepest faith and trust.

It is a common mistake to attempt to soothe such afflictions by gloomy representations of the present world. Men enumerate the manifold sorrows of present life. They number its tears. They point to the places of agony where the cry of suffering pains the ear, or the wail of the stricken heart ascends to heaven. Not one shade in the picture, either from the imperfections incident to humanity, or from the unfaithfulness of individual souls, is left out of sight. And the inference is, that they are peculiarly blessed who soon escape from an existence so perilous and so sorrowful. It is a common sentiment that it is a privilege to die in youth, and that thanksgivings, rather than lamentations, should be heard at the graves of those so early gone. Almost

everywhere that sentiment is recognized. Eloquence enforces it with magic power. And the poetry of consolation is, oftentimes, not only a song of faith in the future, but a dirge over present life.

This may be a natural tendency of feeling, yet it is an error. It may wear the appearance of the deepest faith in the unseen world, yet it really implies a want of trust in the present Father. It is not wise to clothe God's present Providence in gloom in order to explain one mysterious appointment of his will. We thus suggest a question which is far more terrible than that which we attempt to answer. We shake the only foundation upon which true consolation can rest. We must not make it appear a blessing to die, because it is a calamity to live. The picture of life with its manifold changes, its numberless imperfections, should undoubtedly have many shades. Tears are often flowing here. No man lives without occasional visitations of grief. The place of discipline can neither be the Eden of untried joy, nor the Paradise of unbroken rest. Trial, suffering, are always present, as ministering angels; and unless we remember the bright things also which make life itself a blessing, God's present Providence becomes a dark and frowning cloud, and suggests no cheering hopes respecting the mysteries that are now unexplained.

The sweetest consolation comes from an entirely opposite view. The statement may at first appear untrue; yet in proportion as we learn to regard present life as a blessing, the gloom which rests upon its early close begins to be removed. When we magnify the love which beams from every part of the universe that

is now open to our view, we have an assurance of the mercy that must be equally present in all that is still hidden from our sight. Doth the same fountain send forth sweet waters and bitter? Particular difficulties must be interpreted by the general spirit of the Father's Providence. The occasional clouds melt away in this pervading light. It is with man as with the child in his earthly home. When parental love surrounds him as an atmosphere, when the glance of tenderness which first fell upon his heart, like sunlight upon the earth, beams upon him still unchanged, a sweet filial trust will feel that the unexplained commandment, the apparent cross, must be an expression of the same affection. When will a confidence in the All-merciful, as deep as that in fervent earthly friendships, become the spontaneous impulse of the heart? When will man gain the trust that shudders at a questioning thought as it would at a rebellious act? Would you open the noblest, the only exhaustless fountain of consolation? Recount with grateful hearts the tokens of God's exhaustless love. Come with the tongue of eloquence, not moved to sad discoursings concerning the present world, but touched by the fire of love, to speak with wondering joy of the revelations of the Father's tenderness. Repeat the miracles of mercy that are manifested here to the eye of faith. Strike the harp to notes of gladness that you may celebrate the compassions of a present God. Pour out these great anthems of praise, chant forth this high argument, until the light of love dispels every gloomy thought, as the noon-tide dispels the shade. Then the soul may gain that trust which can look upon all things that God hath made, and call

them good. There may still be sadness in the heart, we know. But each new token of love is another ministry of strength. The Spirit of the Universe is revealed; and the consciousness of a Father's immutable love gradually soothes every doubt and fear to an eternal sleep.

It is not because we think too brightly, but because we think too meanly of our present existence, that its speedy close wears an aspect of gloom. The habitually joyous spirit, which abides in the most cheerful thoughts, finds the needed strength welling up within it. The naturally elastic temperament will be most sustained beneath the pressure of sorrow. And he to whom life is a present heaven will attain the brightest religious trust. When the song of praise is the natural expression of the spirit, no change can entirely destroy its joy. The peaceful heart is attended by its own peace, wherever it may be. We follow Jesus when perils gather thickly around his path, and the malice of his foes is upon the verge of its triumph; when the compassionate heart of the Son of God is to be "pierced with many sorrows" as he witnesses the people's blindness and sin. And out of that deep of tribulation comes the voice of prayer, entreating that his own "joy might remain in the disciples' breasts, that their joy might be full."

I have seen one who lived habitually in the brightest thoughts cheerfully pass away. It was in the very strength of life, in youth's blooming hour, before disappointment had thrown its shade upon hope, and when the world spread itself out before the eye like a paradise of promise. Not from a weary world was the spirit

going, but from a world where it had known no weariness. Yet it was peaceful still. And that peace was but the accomplishment of an unchanging law. Nature, life, all things answer to the spirit. The sunny heart looks over both worlds, only to see, in each, the landscape robed in light. Such a spirit does not go from a world uncheered by the true light from God, unvisited by angel feet. The world may appear a better school, and life may assume a greater value at the hour of its departure. Yet it goes in peace. For behind, and around it, as it were, is the excellent glory whence the great company of God's ministering spirits have always been speaking, and from which the Father's voice has always been heard. And it can trust the love that has never failed.

We must gain such a bright view of life that we shall feel that we are only floating upon a sea of love, where the mists before us are gently lifted up by the Spirit's breath, if we would silence our questions concerning these early departures. We shall not speak of them then as untimely events. Indeed the true view prompts us to say, alike respecting an early removal and a prolonged life, "It is well." We shall not say it is blessed to die young; but we shall believe it is well with those who are early taken. For why are they removed, if it be not best for their individual souls? Some ministry in the unseen world may be more appropriate for them. Therefore they are transferred to more genial spheres, as the weak in body are carried to the more healthful influences of balmy climes. But we shall also believe that this is the fitting sphere for those who stay. It is good for them, heaven's especial bene-

diction, to continue here. No heavenly ministries, nothing which imagination conceives of the unseen world can be so well for *them*, or they would not be permitted to remain. Life, toilsome, tearful, agonized though it sometimes be, *life* is better for them than death. For somehow, from its hardship and its toil, its agonies and tears, if these are appointed, a blessing is designed to be unfolded, which the glories of the unseen world could not now bestow. The genuine spirit of trust is never content with a general acknowledgment of the wisdom of the Father's Providence. It feels that each particular event must be wisest too. It does not merely say, "An infinite mercy reigns;" but, because God's mercy is infinite, it feels that not a sparrow falls without its notice. Nay, it concentrates all these bright thoughts into a burning and shining light to cheer the present night of grief and tears.

I know that one difficulty occasionally arises when we attempt to lift our thoughts upward to the doctrine of a sublime Christian trust. It is so far above the common life of men, it so greatly transcends the absorbing sorrow of the first experience of grief, that it seems to be wanting in sympathy with the trials of the human heart. It is not thus with a truly *Christian* thought. We read that Jesus wept when he was about to redeem Lazarus from the power of the grave. It is the special peculiarity of his life, that he meets humanity at each stage of its weakness, even while he manifests the serenity of God. Yet while we rejoice in all these beautiful expressions of his sympathy, why should we not also lift our thoughts to that spirit which can dry every tear? We know that the soul faints when lives

so bright, in the beauty of their youth, vanish from our sight. We are not speaking without experience. We know how we are sometimes prompted to exclaim in the anguish of loneliness,

“Answer me, burning stars of night,
Where is the spirit gone?”

Moments occasionally come when we would summon all mysterious things to answer us. But the voice of the spirit of Jesus always makes one reply —

“Be thou still;
Enough to know is given:
Clouds, winds, and stars *their* part fulfil,
Thine is to trust in Heaven!”

And why should we not thus trust in the hushed silence of human griefs? What blessed invitations to that trust are spread out before our eyes! What invitations are coming in gracious words to the soul! How calmly nature looks upon the scene when men are passing from the earth! Who hath not seen the moon waxing in brightness when the young and beautiful were departing, and the tide of joyous life was fast ebbing into the sea of Eternity? Or who hath not seen the sun in its rising beauty, or noontide glory, as the last sand of earthly existence fell? And who that witnessed it, hath not felt, for the moment, an added pang, from the contrast between the brightness of the world without, and the gloom of the world within? Yet why *should* not the sun shine brightly still, and nature put on her garments of beauty? A deeper reflection tells us that no law is violated, that no blessed design of

Providence is hindered when the youthful die? Why should not the unclouded light of heaven fall upon the tomb in which the early dead are resting? It is a fitting expression of the true lesson of the Providence which we are witnessing. Nature smiles upon the grave, as upon the unbroken circles of human affection. No star is lost from the sky. No ray of light fails. The song of birds doth not cease. All the works of God are the same. Every thing blooms as before. Whatever is passive to the will of God remains unchanged. In man's soul alone there is darkness. Are not these sweet expressions of the lesson of an equal trust inscribed upon heaven and earth in letters of light and love? Do they not seem to say, God designs to besiege the soul by this all-encompassing host of ministering spirits, until it surrenders every thought of gloom?

The voice of Jesus interprets and confirms these bright lessons of nature. That divine sufferer, whose experience pierced the depths of human trial, so that "he knew what was in man," comes with his words of sympathy to mingle with our griefs as no voice of nature mingles with them. And yet he causes light to rise upon the soul more glorious than the sun in heaven; a light to which there can be no more night. Here is the ministry that meets our weakness, and deifies us too; that stoops to us, in whatever depth of sadness or unworthiness we may be, and woos us to repose in the Father's bosom; that lifts its voice above the troubled scenes of human life, to say, "Come unto me, ye heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It comes to weep with those who weep, yet to hush every expres-

sion of unmingled sadness, and to tell us to sing only the song of victorious trust over the graves of the early departed.

The lesson is ever the same, and ever dear. The only, but alas, the great difficulty is, to make the bright thoughts that transiently gleam upon us in moments of trustful meditation, profound sentiments, that will abide undisturbed in the deep places of the heart. The difficulty is to make these occasional recognitions of brighter truths a perpetual sunlight. And the greatness of that attainment often tempts us to despondency. Christianity has proclaimed its bright revelations through long centuries, and yet the deep gloom which once rested upon the grave before Jesus rolled the stone from the door of the sepulchre, seems still to settle, deep and heavily, upon the Christian world. We are not yet sufficiently advanced to see the law of death itself, in its general application, in the light of a Christian faith. Much less are we able to explain the special trial which its operation brings. It is not these shadowy convictions which we often dignify by the name of faith, that can help us. They cannot dry our tears. They cannot speak with a voice of power to calm the troubled waves of the heart. The lesson we say is always the same ; and the exhortation is always the same. Trust not in these shadowy convictions. Live in the thought of God's love until that faith come which is "an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast."

MARCH 6, 1842.

XII.

THE DUTY OF THE HOUR.



I HAVE FINISHED THE WORK WHICH THOU GAVEST ME TO DO.

John xvii. 4.

WE must make one qualification of this declaration in order to gain the exact idea which Jesus intended to convey. The Father's redeeming purposes were not then fulfilled. The work given Jesus to do was not accomplished. Gethsemane, with its agony, then close at hand, the cross, upon which Jesus said again, "It is finished" — these were the beginning, not the end, of the great ministry of mercy. The life and death of the Son of God only laid the corner-stone of the great temple of truth and holiness which is one day to be built up on enduring foundations. The prophetic song of the angels was not then fulfilled in a regenerated earth, the abode of good will and peace. We see only the signs of its fulfilment even at this distant day. The spiritual kingdom was not established, nor was the spiritual King acknowledged then. For instead of being

hailed as the Messiah, and anointed by the gratitude and love of a redeemed world, Jesus was clothed in purple in mockery, and crowned with thorns in scorn.

It was not because Jesus saw the fulfilment of his ministry, that he said that the work given him to do was finished. The Gospel, that new-born child of heaven, was in its infancy when Jesus ascended. It could only be cradled as in a manger then, because there was no room for it in the heart of the world. It was in prophecy, and not in actual fact, that the work could be said to be accomplished. The great work itself was not completed, nor was the direct agency of Jesus ended, when he uttered the words of the text. The Scriptures say, that "He ever liveth to make intercession for us;" and that grand declaration expresses the conviction of every disciple's heart. For a love like that of Jesus could not change its nature when he entered into the invisible world. It became more intense as he ascended into heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father. Jesus did not breathe his last prayer for the sinning when he implored forgiveness for the crucifiers. His intercedings did not cease when his voice of love was no more heard on earth. His ministry was not closed when he vanished from the disciples' sight. As he himself said, he went away only to enter upon a mightier work; to send the all-sustaining, all-illuminating Comforter into their souls. His personal ministry was not ended then. I hear his promise of love: "Lo! I am with you alway, unto the end of the world." And I joyfully receive it as a promise, not only to the first Apostles, but to all who, in the same fidelity, seek to declare his Gospel to the world. I cannot receive

the statement as an assertion of the abstract influence of his truth. I echo that promise, not saying merely, *It*—the truth ever liveth; but, *He*, Jesus himself, “ever liveth to make intercession for us.”

The work itself was not accomplished, the direct agency of Jesus was not ended, when he said, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” The text is not to be thus interpreted. Jesus only referred to that measure of work which was assigned to him upon the earth. It was the duty of the passing hour of which he spoke, when he said, “It is finished.” The great temple of spiritual truth was not built up in the world. But the corner stone was laid, upon which the Apostles and Martyrs and the holy everywhere might build. Men were not yet drawn to the true Messiah. But the Son of Man was lifted up on Calvary, to reveal at the same moment the unutterable compassion of the Father, and the divinity of a life made one with God; to make the mount of sacrifice, the mount of redemption to a sinning world. That brightest chapter in the book of God’s grace, the key to all beside, was written out so clearly, that whosoever would, might read its teachings of love. The earthly ministry was finished. And when man can understand the consecration which Gethsemane symbolizes, and the Cross reveals, when he can fathom the spirit of self-crucifixion which extended to the inmost wishes of the heart, until there was but one will, the will of the Father, within the soul—then he will perceive the depth of meaning in the words, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

Jesus referred to the perfect fulfilment of the duty of

the hour in the declaration which we have selected as the text. It can have no other meaning when applied to him who is the ever living Intercessor. And here we see how it may be applied to the disciple as well as to the Master. The fulfilment of the duty of the hour is the only way in which the work assigned to ever-advancing, undying, spirits can be accomplished. And if the stream of life which flows from Calvary could fill us with the same living devotion, it would enable us also to say, "Our work is finished." The work of a true heart is always finished, and yet it is always beginning. It is not ended even when certain results seem to be gained. Man may plant great truths in the heart of the world, whose results will be glorious in future time. But that is the beginning, not the end, of his ministry. His work is not ended when a certain period of years has passed, though they may have been devoted to the truth in singleness of purpose. For the next moment of life is a trumpet-call to new contests against evil, or to new ministries of truth and love. What are all added moments on earth, or in heaven, to be, but new unfoldings of the life and love of God? The work may be always finished, and always beginning. We can only apply the text to that part of life which has already passed, even when man has been truly faithful. And man might so live, that, at every period of his existence, from the absolute infancy of the spiritual life to the highest degree of progress now conceived, or yet conceivable, he could repeat the joyous declaration, "I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do."

This entire devotion to the duty of the passing hour is the only fulfilment of the work assigned to man. I

cherish this thought for many reasons. In the first place, it is a partial solution of the mystery which perplexes us whenever youthful and earnest souls have passed, or are passing away. We often forget it, when such events break the circles of our friendship or love. We not only mourn the loss of such dear companionships. We mourn over what we term an unfinished work — an untimely end. We image those thus departing by broken columns ; by flowers blighted in their early budding. We are ready to imagine that the purposes of heaven have been disappointed. We fear that the column thus broken will never be completed, because we are not permitted to see its beauty ; that these flowers, so suddenly blighted, will never produce their natural and perfect fruit. We forget that it is because they are better fitted for the air of heaven than for the storms of earth, and are withdrawn from sight that they may ripen there. A work unfinished ! An untimely end to the ministries of life ! Not thus are we to regard these facts in a Father's Providence. Would that the conviction might be ever present with us, that, not in length of years, but in the fulfilment of the duty of the passing hour, is the accomplishment of the work given us to do. The child comes to our arms, looks up lovingly into our eyes, and flies away. He lays his hand upon our heart, opening a new world of feelings by his touch, and then departs to be seen no more. Yet his work is not unfinished, because his life is so quickly closed. The message has been left with the heart, that light from heaven remains, although the angel-messenger is no more at our side. It *may* remain, we should rather say. It is not the brevity of the ministry, but

our own indifference that causes it to be forgotten. Even the work of the infant is finished. It came to reveal a vision of truth and love and straight returned to heaven. But, let the men of years, the neglecters of the work assigned to them by the plain intimations of Providence, who often wonder at these untimely departures, — let them say whether length of years fulfils the work which the Father ordained when he created a living soul. Let those answer who are convicted, by the judgment of conscience, of burying their talent in the earth; who, instead of gaining a living sympathy with the love of Jesus, are indifferent to the wail of human woe, or the perdition of human sin. How many feel that what we call an untimely death would have been infinitely better than this lengthening out of life, with this remorse of conscience for wasted years! There are untimely deaths all around us. It is the unfaithfulness of the soul, and not the period in which they occur, that makes them so. And the departure of those who have lived many years is sometimes a thousand fold more untimely than that of the young can possibly be. Every period in which the unfaithful die must be untimely. Who has not learned by his experience, that few departures from the world can be regarded like those of the young? How often, in all other cases, there is the remembrance of duties unperformed, which the mantle of charity cannot altogether conceal! These are the broken columns which seem to stand up as images of woe. The sting of death, in personal experience, or in the records of human memory, “the *sting* of death is sin.” I throw aside all consideration of the length of years when I ask whether the work assigned

has been finished. There is no sting in death when the self-sacrificing and devoted depart, though they go away in the promise of youthful days. It is the fidelity which filled the hour with kindly feelings and beneficent deeds, that determines our age in the sight of heaven. The work of the hour accomplished! The question at the judgment of Jesus is, "Hast thou been faithful in a few things, in thy appointed day?" And the answer to that heralds the glad approval, "Enter into the joy of thy Lord."

Here are sure and abundant consolations respecting what we often so recklessly call untimely deaths. But the text suggests still another thought when we pursue its application to every earnest and faithful soul. Its work is finished whenever it goes. And yet its work is not ended, when it vanishes from our eyes. Possibly its true life may have just begun, in the unfolding of its energies amid the influences of the heavenly world, when we say, in common speech, that it has closed. The declaration of Jesus, that his departure from the world would be the beginning of a mightier agency, conveys a bright and beautiful hint concerning the future life of every earnest soul. It suggests the idea of the ministries of love which may still be exercised by those once closely connected with us in the present world. Possibly those ministries may begin, in the noblest sense, when the earthly ministry is ended. Is it not in harmony with the spirit of a universe in which the winds are God's angels, to suppose that the departed, when they enter upon a truer vision and an intenser life, may whisper still to the souls to whom they once loved to speak? May they not bring the messages

of the Comforter to those who are prepared to hear? And the whisper of a spirit thus exalted may be a nobler ministry than the most earnest words from loving lips. The loving and the true, taken from the contests against sin upon the earth, may only be standing more nearly to the throne, sending down to those remaining in the midst of the strife, a divine wisdom for their guide, and a godlike energy for their inspiration. May they not all cast their mantles upon us when they ascend, so that the departure of the faithful may invest those who remain with new robes of power?

A devotion to the duty of the passing hour is the only fulfilment of the work given man to do. This thought suggests also the great doctrine of life. It enforces its most impressive admonition, and intimates its greatest hope. It discloses the deep meaning of that urgent entreaty, "Now is the accepted time," — and of all similar calls to present fidelity. It is not well to interpret such passages merely as invitations to improve present calls of love, lest none others should be made. In such an interpretation the most important thought is forgotten. Every present hour brings its own duty, and now only can it be done. There can be no other accepted time for that particular service. For the next moment brings its duty also, which demands the full measure of human power. No space remains for compensation for the period which is lost. The great doctrine of life's responsibility is here unfolded in all its impressiveness, to enforce the word "now" with awful solemnity. We see what a great thing it is to *fulfil* the work given us to do. And we perceive the force of the teaching in the consciousness, more or less distinct in

all our hearts, that we are clothed with no worthy proportion of the life and power which might have been ours. I am overcome by temptations now, in consequence of past unfaithfulness, which I might long ago have vanquished. I speak in weakness, when, perhaps, I might have pleaded for truth with a victorious power. I am still a child, when I should have been a man. I am stumbling at the beginning of the way, when I might have been treading the height of virtue with firm and steady feet. Let men, bowed down as they must be, in moments of reflection, by thoughts like these — so redeem all future hours in remembrance of this dread admonition, that there may be no added bitterness to these reproaching memories.

The solemnity and the hope of life, are alike disclosed by the teaching of the text. The responsibility of existence almost overwhelms us, as it is declared in the words of Jesus. But it is distributed into the minuter duties which the passing hours may bring, and weak humanity may be strengthened to meet it all. We are not to be discouraged by the great duties of future days. We are to meet the comparatively little demand of the present moment. And, as one who is travelling in the thickest mist, always finds that the next step to be taken is clearly seen, so it will be in the leadings of God's Providence. What though fearful sacrifices may hereafter be demanded? We shall be gradually led up the mount of sacrifice, and the final step will be as easy as the first. Here is the hope of life; the hope of fulfilling the trust which, otherwise, would appal us by its greatness. Each successive duty may be met. The dread responsibility may be truly borne. The tide of

life may roll on, swollen by the contributions of every successive hour. And, triumphantly, yet in humble remembrance of the strength whereby he lives, man may ever say, "I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; I have finished the work given me to do."

And why may we not receive the declaration of the text in its simple, yet grand application to every child of our race? The full devotion of heart to the duty of the hour is the only accomplishment of our work. Every other interpretation must involve an absurdity. God's work is never finished. All the labors of the long line of faithful servants from eldest time are only steps in his great plan of mercy. His glorious design of love "was, and is, and is to come." What appears most majestic in human attainment may have only the same relation to the blessed whole, as the lily of the field to this boundless universe. What works of man can be named in such a comparison? The labor of long generations only inscribes one word in the book of God's love which is to be unfolded to the ages as they pass. The ministry of Jesus, all-glorious though it were, the hope of earth, the joy of heaven, even that is but a page in this great volume of mercy. And what new revelations of love shall beam from these great manifestations of the Father in the long periods of eternal progress! God's work is never finished. And, therefore, man's work can never end. It is not finished by the flight of years, even when life continues through the longest day of earthly existence. Yet the duty of the hour can be met. The work of our infancy may be accomplished by faithful endeavors, although, in its

utmost perfection, it must be only a prelude to the nobler labor of manhood.

Devotion to the duty of the hour is the fulfilment of our work. If I were truly wise, I should question nothing respecting the apparent limitations of our existence. "Are there not twelve hours in the day?"—said Jesus, when the disciples endeavored to deter him from returning to Judea,—"Are there not twelve hours in the day? Work while the day lasts." Every man has an earthly immortality until his work is done. The twelve hours of his appointed day shall come. Let him work while the day lasts. No opposition could bring Jesus to the Cross until the seeds of truth had been planted in the world. And nothing can harm the faithful servant until his work is done. Let him work while the day lasts. We know that what we are able to accomplish is as nothing. We can only speak of our endeavors in humility, in comparison with the work of Jesus. In this wide ocean of sorrow and sin, God is building up an abode of truth, a dwelling-place of love, which shall rise at last above the waves. And man's most efficient action is like the work of the single insect, deep in the sea, which adds one grain to the rock whereon fertile isles shall eventually rest. Yet let him come with that contribution towards the fulfilment of God's purposes of love. "Work while the day lasts;" and, although the labor be humble, and the time be short, yet the spirit which faithfully toils will gain a full and free sympathy with the heart of Jesus himself. Humanity can know no higher hope, and can attain no diviner end.

JULY 23, 1843.

XIII.

ENDURING LIFE.



THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN ARE TEMPORAL ; BUT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN, ETERNAL. — 2 Corinthians iv. 18.

“THE things which are seen are temporal.” There are moments of deep experience in the history of most men when this truth is felt as an overwhelming conviction, although it is disregarded, or forgotten, in ordinary life. In the days of sudden calamity, it rushes into the heart with a power that needs no words of man to give it impressiveness. Even the vivid comparisons of Scripture, which illustrate the transitoriness of the things that are seen by “the morning cloud,” and “the early dew,” present imperfect images of our actual feeling. The strong man, before the company of friends, who hasten to his side with winged feet, can gather round him, bows his head and sinks away. The child, fair as the morning flower, bright as morn itself in the radiance of

infant life, droops before the nightfall. It may seem like an age of experience ; yet it is only a moment of time, and the voice that was full of glee is forever hushed. Death sometimes comes into the circles of love like the lightning's bolt out of the cloudless sky. How the peculiar illustrations of this truth, which, like the miracle, compel attention, but are still recognized as only peculiar illustrations of a universal law — how they sometimes bring shuddering convictions of danger into the heart. They send the mother, with noiseless step, to listen to the breathing of the sleeping child, lest disease may steal upon it unperceived. They impel the friend to look inquiringly into the face of friends, to see whether the flush upon the cheek is the hue of disease, or the bright promise of health. They cause the strong man to tremble while he steps, lest the ground fail beneath his feet. They make men feel that the silent air is filled with the arrows of disease ; unperceived in their flight, until they are fixed in their own breast, or in the breast of friend or child. Sometimes Providence preaches the truth of the text until man believes, and trembles. And the deepest impression in such moments of conviction, though it made men dread to sleep lest they should wake no more, no such impression could exaggerate the truth that “the things which are seen are temporal.” We hail the coming of these welcome gifts, these opening lives, as if they should remain. They rise, bright as the morning when it beams over land and sea. But every morning foretells another night. Every birth, in one point of view, is the prophecy of another death. We look in one direction, and a host of beings are springing into life,

and hastening onward with bounding, joyous feet. We turn and follow them, and they are all marching in one unbroken procession to the grave. For "the things which are *seen*, are temporal."

And now we ask, what is the inference from this fact? If the things which are seen are so fleeting, then a multitude of voices exclaim, he is happy who has learned not to look at "the things which are seen." When those die to whom they were not bound by the strongest ties, many rejoice that they had not loved them better while they lived. Love not your child so well, say some, for every drop in the cup of present affection may be changed into a fountain of bitterness to swell the flood of sorrow. Chasten these strong currents of affection which seem to sweep the whole energy of feeling towards one cherished object. It is better to be partially weaned now, though it be through a sharp self-denial, than to incur the peril of a crucifixion. And thus an exhortation is often heard not to enter so earnestly into the scenes of the world, because they may all be speedily changed; not to love so deeply, lest the depth of present love become an occasion of future and abiding anguish.

The true inference from the fact which we are considering is just the reverse. The true exhortation is of a precisely opposite character. The transitoriness of the things that are seen is the precise reason why we should not turn from them, but live in them with a deep devotion. When we live intensely in the things that are seen, we gain clear perceptions of the things that are not seen and eternal. Thus do we gain the highest joy from them while they remain; and, though it seem

mysterious, yet it is strictly true, thus do we obtain the best preparation for their departure.

Are the things that are seen so fleeting? Therefore live in them with deeper devotion. Is there reason to think that the angel may quickly depart? May the child speedily take his flight? Then I can lose no hour of his stay. Then I can waste no moment in which I can consider and learn his message. He came directly from the Father to nestle awhile in my arms in infant weakness. He had a heavenly mission. His look alone could stir the deep things of the soul, and minister to its noblest life. And whatever we feel to be a ministering spirit to the soul, be it reverently said, should be regarded with the rapt attention to be given to an actual Redeemer. Were such a visitant in our midst, we could not consent to lose one word from his lips. We could not willingly permit one act to pass unobserved. We could not spare a single look. We should long to know every part of his message, before he ascended from our view. Ought it not to be so with every angel that comes to bless us? I would know his every expression, his slightest teaching. Does the thought that he may speedily depart, make me imagine that he is already moving his wings to soar away? I should only turn with an earnestness deep as a prayer, to live in a life that is so fleeting while it may continue. I must not grieve the Spirit which is speaking now by conjectures concerning the nature of its ministries in future years. Give me this day my daily bread. Let me drink the cup of joy which is offered now. Let me listen to the teaching of the hour with a devotion so

absorbing that its transitoriness is partially forgotten in the earnest love of the heart.

But we pass from this consideration to dwell upon the other thought, which is apparently so false, yet so strictly true, that the deepest life in the things that are seen is the best preparation for their departure. We say this thought apparently so false ; because it contradicts the usual modes of speech. And yet there is one sense in which it is instantly seen to be true. The most devoted love for Jesus, for example, though it might seem only to leave the disciples deeper mourners, was their living baptism with his spirit. The inward power which triumphed in Jesus came to them as the Comforter, with all its revelations of truth and peace. Thus did his "joy remain in them, and their joy was full." If there be a paternal Providence, thus it must be with every thing which ministers in the heart of man. If not one sparrow falls without the Father, not one blessing can pass away until its use may have prepared us for its departure. All the ministering spirits of God, like the prophet of old, may leave their mantles behind them when they ascend. When we fully receive their message, the Comforter always enters the soul. Although it may appear to be a mystery, is it not an evident truth that a devotion to the teacher which makes the heart one with his, a devotion which receives the fulness of his message, is the best preparation for his loss ? Thus his spirit remains, though his presence is withdrawn ; and he is with us still, although we see his face no more.

But it is not altogether mystery. How sweetly has it been confirmed in the deep experience of a thousand

hearts! How surely, for instance, are all hours of truest affection remembered as sources of purest consolation, when the loved have departed! The seasons of select joy, whose expectation lighted up the day of weary toil, whose loss might appear a cause of mourning beyond alleviation, these, *these*, in remembrance, send forth perennial springs of peace. Is not this verified in living experience? At first, the idea of their absence will bring the deepest night. But soon the smile of a child rises in memory as a cheering star, and every hour of joy, every expression of gladness, every moment of its innocent mirth is another, and yet another star to bless us. If there be many such remembrances the whole firmament of thought is filled with their serene and soothing beams. At first they may only bring thoughts of sadness, until the garden of former delight becomes, as with Jesus, the place of peculiar agony. We say, with him, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But gradually they become loved and happy memories; blessed angels. And as they crowd upon the mind, they bring comforting, strengthening thoughts which cannot die, but abide within the soul as their everlasting home. Then the secret treasures of true feeling are revealed. Even the little incidents of life which seemed to make only a momentary impression, and which had long been forgotten in the new sources of pleasure that were opened in each succeeding hour, even these then revive with mighty influence. The seed that was "sown in weakness" is then "raised in power." The simplest act of love, performed with true feeling, that little seed then becomes a tree, under whose branches the heart may

rest. Providence thus gathers up the things that were unremembered until the hour of loss, the forgotten fragments of previous joys, and converts them into a feast in the wilderness into which it leads us.

And, observe that it is only the hours of most devoted love, the seasons in which the feeling of the heart was most intense, that are thus remembered. It is only what are sometimes thought to be the great causes of mourning that can appear to us as comforters. The times when the heart was divided, when we failed to yield ourselves to the enjoyment of God's darling gifts, brought little happiness while those gifts remained; and they leave no peace behind them when the gifts are taken. The preparation for these angel-remembrances is the absorbing devotion of the heart. And their power and brightness will be in exact proportion to the depth of that devotion. Is it not true that the deepest life in the things that are seen is the best preparation for their departure? Let the experience of living hearts answer.

And the heart answers yet again, when we penetrate more deeply into its experience. The same truth is confirmed by still another course of reflections. What after all produces the chief anguish of sorrow? What creates the sting of grief? It is not the thought that we are bereft of what constituted the chief beauty of existence; that the voice of gladness which sounded like the music of heaven in our earthly homes, is forever hushed. It is not the loneliness of life only, though it sometimes appears as if we were indeed alone on this side of the grave. It is not the trial of a spirit whose devotion would have made it gladly go down to the

tomb with all its imperfections thick upon it, if that could have availed to save its beloved object. It is not these things. It is the memory of hours when the departed gift was neglected; when an act of impatience, or injustice, caused a shade of sorrow to come over the countenance that can now be seen no more. This is the agony of human grief. These things make conscience come forth in judgment when we stand by the grave, and add the torture of remorse to the anguish of sorrow. We never regret the depth of our love. We only regret the absence of a deeper devotion to the ministering spirits who were once by our side. We regret the grieved look which we imagine them to cast upon us for our neglects. Like the look of Jesus upon Peter, these remembrances send us away to weep bitterly. There is no other worm which does not die. This alone causes the places of associations with the departed to be places of agony. But when the heart has been true, such spots are hallowed to the soul; filled with ministries of peace. Every place once blessed by living joy becomes forever sacred. A better light beams upon it than visits other scenes. It becomes a shrine to which we love to journey. Truly we are wonderfully made, when the devotion of feeling which makes bereavement most severe, and the associations that revive the remembrance of trial, furnish the elements of the most abiding consolation.

And there is yet another confirmation of the same general thought. The assured hope of those everlasting reunions for which affection always sighs, can only exist in hearts which have been truly devoted in the now sundered relationships of time. What unions

will endure, interrupted, indeed, for a season, but never severed? What affections will remain unchilled by the grave, indestructible by the change of death? Not those which only moved the surface of the heart, but never penetrated its profoundest depths. Not those which separation in this world would destroy. We have no right to hope that aught but a friendship that is pure and deep, a union of the heart in the profoundest sympathies of being, can survive the decays of time, —or pass into that spiritual world in which nothing except what is spiritual and immortal can live. We have no right to hope that the last great change will leave unimpaired what present changes have power to kill. We cannot hope for reunions in another world when there has been no living union here. Death will doubtless sound an eternal knell to all superficial friendships. But a bond like that which united the beloved disciple to his Lord cannot be severed. The relationships of disinterested feeling and holy sympathy, whatever draws power and depth from the fathomless affections of the human heart, whatever liveth, shall never die. If angelic ministries be permitted to the beloved departed, if they may bring blessed influences to the loved who remain, must they not flow through the channels of deepest affection alone? These bonds of the heart may constitute the electric communication between earth and heaven whereby light and joy may be transmitted to saddened hearts. This conjecture may seem, and may be, too bold. Still, we know that there can be no reunions in another world except when the earthly relationships have

woven sympathies that are as deep as the heart, and enduring as its love.

Live in the things that are seen with profound devotion, and you gain the best preparation for their departure. There may be one perversion of this doctrine; and yet the mistake is too glaring really to mislead us. There may be an *unwise* devotion to the relationships of present life, but it cannot be too deep. The difference between the true child of heaven and the mere child of earth does not consist in this; that one concentrates his thoughts upon the things that are seen, while the other neglects them. To a merely superficial view, each might seem alike absorbed in the duties and ties of present life. But one lives in those everlasting affections which the changes and incidents of life may quicken, while the other lives in selfish aims. If we desire to have these immortal affections burn as enduring fires, we must intently listen to each messenger of God as it hurries by. We are told that the experience of change should teach the vanity of all outward things. In one sense that is true. In another, the lesson is precisely the reverse. Changes come to teach us what immortal ends these fleeting events, and transient relationships, may serve. Then we see what everlasting affections they may call into being. In one sense life never appears so valuable as by the grave of the fondest earthly hopes. Then we see that the angels of Providence that appeared only to vanish may have brought immortal messages. Then we see what eternal lessons may be gained through a true life in the things of time. Then we see that the

most intense devotion to the teaching of the hour, the most fervent affection in its rapidly passing relationships, are the keys to unlock immortal, undecaying treasures. Do not say that these quickly passing forms are only as bubbles which appear for a moment upon the sea, to be broken by the next ripple upon the surface. Even the transient bubble exhibits these great laws of nature which span the Universe in their embrace. So, in these quickly vanishing bonds of earthly life, may be found the elements of that life which will endure throughout Eternity. Transient scenes may develop the life of the eternal heart. They are not clothed in gloom by these changing ministries, but they are transfigured forever.

We speak of the transitoriness of present relationships only to enforce the exhortation to live in them with greater devotion. When shall we recognize the sublime harmony between the present and the future under the Father's Providence? When shall we learn that the profoundest life in the world that now is must be the best preparation for the world that is to come? When shall we learn that he who would inherit the full joy of pure affections in immortal scenes, must drink most deeply of the cup of joy which all present unions of the heart may offer to his lips. He who is prepared to gain the future world has this world also in blest possession. The admonition from each opening grave is the same. The most thrilling lessons of uncertainty have the same great meaning. They do not say, "Love the less" — but "Love the more." If the things that are seen are so fleeting, gather all the treasures of instruction in these quickly flying hours with profound

earnestness. Thus will they bring the utmost joy while they remain. And the depth of your devotion will unfold a sustaining strength when they have vanished. Live in the things that are seen with a love as deep as if they were eternal; and, through that very love, the eternal things shall come forth from the grave of the objects of time with an unfailing power to console.

SEPT. 20, 1840.

XIV.

THE MINISTRY OF NATURE TO HUMAN GRIEF.



CONSIDER THE LILIES HOW THEY GROW. IF GOD SO CLOTHE THE GRASS WHICH IS TO-DAY IN THE FIELD, AND TO-MORROW IS CAST INTO THE OVEN, HOW MUCH MORE WILL HE CLOTHE YOU ? — Luke xii. 27, 28.

THE text illustrates the manner in which Jesus addresses human anxieties and fears. The disciples were just entering upon an untried path, which must lead them amidst perpetual difficulties and dangers. Yet Jesus does not directly attempt to remove a single apprehension or anxiety. He conceals none of their future perils. He simply raises their thoughts to God's manifested and boundless love. He speaks of the omnipresent care that guides the stars, and upholds the minutest thing. He pronounces the word Father as the expression and the assurance of the unutterable grace of God. He declares great truths which must include the solution of perplexing questions and present sorrows, though their explanation may now be unseen. "Lift up your eyes," he says, "and though you are

beneath the shadow of an impenetrable cloud, behold heaven and earth rejoicing in cloudless light. God holds the sparrow in his guardian hand. He clothes the lilies with their matchless grace. Do not deem yourself an orphan in this universe of mercy, even though you experience the anguish of a cross. Behold how all things float upon a sea of love. If the storm overwhelm you, if the friends to whom you cling disappear from your sight, still believe that every thing is comprehended in the same ocean of goodness; embosomed in the paternal embrace of God."

When Jesus would comfort the troubled heart, he does not speak directly to its peculiar trial, but leads it up to higher views of truth. Observe two or three illustrations of this divine method of consolation. When the apostles hear of their Master's approaching death, and are almost speechless with wonder and grief, Jesus announces the doctrine of his higher and spiritual presence. He raises their thoughts to the conception of the Comforter, who would pour new light upon his own life, and reveal, with new clearness, the truth and love of God; and he endeavors to sustain them in their despondency by the boundless hope of that higher faith. The sister of Lazarus hastens to meet her adored teacher and friend with the natural questions of grief. But, although he designs to restore the dead to life, he does not directly answer her inquiries. He declares, "Thy brother shall live again," "I am the Resurrection and the Life." He reveals the brightness of immortality where the shadows of death are thick and dark, and, by the vision of infinite truth, draws the mind from the region of grief into the heaven

of peace. In the same way, in moments of fear, he points to the fowls of the air, and the lilies of the field; and attempts to hush present anxieties, not by a direct argument to show their folly, but by the revelation of an Infinite Father, and an all-embracing love.

I revere the wisdom of this divine method of consolation in the ministry of Jesus. How philosophical is the process, and how harmonious with the theory of human life, and of the universe itself! During the whole course of the soul's education, there is but one sufficient remedy for the difficulties which it may meet. The child finds a problem which he cannot solve. His true help comes in the attainment of a new principle, which solves not only the present difficulty, but innumerable others. As his whole mind is thus expanded, and raised to a higher plane of thought, obstacles that once seemed gigantic shrink away and vanish out of sight. Humanity falters amidst the assaults of temptation, or becomes hardened against the cry of suffering. Its true deliverance comes when it is led to Calvary's top, to the Mount of God, and is quickened by new conceptions of truth, and new impulses of compassion. In that divine strength it finds power to resist and conquer. If the body droop in the sickly air, it must be removed to the atmosphere of health. If the soul faint amidst anxieties and griefs which it cannot dispel, it must gain a new vision and a new conviction of the love of God. This indirect ministry, though it may not answer particular questions, will most effectually meet the wants of man. Let him consider the fowls of the air, and the lilies of the field! Let him reflect upon the beauty that adorns the world!

Let him look upward to the throne amidst such tokens of love, until the veiling clouds seem to roll away, and the light of the Father's presence shines down upon his path. The night of human anxiety and grief never ends until this everlasting morning dawns.

How truly this indirect ministry of consolation harmonizes with the great conditions of our existence! By the theory of our existence we are "shut up unto faith." The sphere of human knowledge is vast and glorious. Man tracks the courses of the planets, and explores the depths of space, with the precision with which he explores the earth. The actual attainments of Science surpass all prophetic imaginations; and yet they are but the preparation for achievements far more grand. Still, there is one class of problems which Science alone can never solve. When it enters the bereaved home and meets a human heart in the agony of grief, it can give no explanation of the suffering. When it stands by the grave in which the hopes of life are buried, it can call forth no answer to its inquiries from the unbroken silence. Faith alone rolls away the stone and unseals the tomb. Faith pierces the veil which knowledge cannot raise, and sees the light of the invisible world transfiguring the face of death, and causing the portals of the sepulchre to appear as the gates of glory.

How divinely this world is adapted to be a home for Faith! The love of God is revealed in unutterable clearness. It floods the world with new manifestations of its presence with every morning's light. Yet the particular trials of men are often left in mysterious shadow. Have you ever been racked with the ques-

tions, "Why is this peculiar trial sent to me?"—"Why must the bereaving angel take this cherished spirit from my side?"—"Why must my home be shrouded in gloom, when other homes are filled with joy?"—"What is the explanation of this experience which changes the entire aspect of life, and even of the world itself?" But not one whisper of explanation is heard in answer to such questions. The veiled form of grief remains with lips sealed amidst our agonies. The soul, like the caged bird, beating its wings against its prison bars, is only made more conscious of its bondage by its vain attempts. This is a world for faith, and not for exact knowledge. We behold the lilies of the field in their spotless beauty. We behold the sky arching over us, shining with the light of innumerable worlds. We know that they manifest a love which is more enduring than those stars or suns. But they do not speak to solve the secret of our grief. We look to Jesus, and behold in his works of love, and on his cross, one radiant expression of divine benignity. Yet the benignant Redeemer does not answer our inquiries. He meets the troubled soul with the general doctrine of the Father's love, and says, "Consider the lilies of the field." This world is the home for faith. This fact explains this state of mingled light and darkness. An infinite wisdom is displayed both in what is unveiled, and in what is concealed. Enough is told to establish a foundation for faith which is strong and sure, while the birds of heaven are fed, or the lilies bloom. Faith sees enough to enable it to cast its anchor within the veil. Yet enough is hidden to leave it to be tossed by every billow upon the sea of life. When the waves

sleep, and the heart does not strain upon the anchor of its hope, man does not realize this fact in his condition. But when the storm is high, and the idea of the infinite love of God is felt to be his only refuge, then he sees how he is indeed "shut up unto faith," by the theory of his nature, and by the conditions of his existence.

An independent argument for religious faith might easily be built upon this single consideration. Its necessity to the life of the soul is proof of its reasonableness. The fact that man is thrown back upon it for support, with his questions unanswered, when every feeling is awakened to an agony of suffering, is enough to show that it must have enduring foundations. Unless man may trust its revelations, the word consolation is a dream. If man cannot trust to faith, God only wounds without providing the ministry of healing for earth's sharpest griefs. Then there is no Father in these infinite heavens, and the soul is parted from every anchor to which it clings. "Consider the lilies of the field," and behold, in their silent beauty, the answer to such questions or fears. Doth God care for the grass? Does he arrange the processes that nurture it into freshness, and robe it in beauty? And shall he not much more minister to the troubled heart? Fear not in the darkest hour. Receive the teaching of this, manifested love, and be at peace.

I know how difficult it is, in the moments of grief, to remember the brighter thoughts to which Jesus directs the mind. The cry of present anxiety, or overwhelming sorrow, so near, forever sounding within the breast night and day, seems to silence for a season the ten thousand proclamations of the Father's love. The

cloud upon the heart veils the face of God. Indeed, in the first impulse of anguish, we sometimes shrink from brighter, happier thoughts. The sunshine in nature, the joy of glad hearts, clash with the sacred grief in the soul, like the sound of blasphemy in the places of prayer. The chosen ministries of consolation become an offence, rather than a solace, and bring a new sense of pain. How sharply defined the lines of these trying contrasts sometimes are in the experience of life ! In the silence of night we stand in the chamber where disease wears away the thread of life, and makes the indications of the coming change more distinct upon the countenance every hour, and look out upon the repose of nature. The moon rolls on in all her brightness, and every plant and leaf is bathed in light and drinks in the refreshing dew. Perhaps night never seemed more beautiful or calm. Day after day of wasting sickness hurrying on the fatal hour, is followed by night after night so radiant in loveliness. We stand upon the dividing line between a scene that is filled with all the elements of sadness, and one that is altogether bright beneath the smile of Infinite love. The heart must indeed be thoroughly disciplined, if we are never racked, for one moment, by the contrast ; if we never permit the inward grief to dim the outward beauty, and retain sufficient calmness to hear the still, small voice of God which bids us trust. Thus the broad moon of the Passover looked down upon Jesus when he knelt in Gethsemane, in his bitter agony. Its rays pierced the shade of the olive trees and gently kissed his brow, while he "sweat as it were great drops of blood." This smile of nature must have been a sweet assurance

of the Father's love to Jesus, amid his conflict with an agony keener than the anguish of the cross. It was one of God's ministering angels, to whisper the promise of the legions more that were ready to come and strengthen him. Even while he prayed, "If this cup may not pass from me, not as I will, but as thou wilt," — the loveliness of nature seemed as beautiful as when he sat upon the mountain and uttered the words of the text. But how can we enter into our own Gethsemane and still see God's love all around us without one veil or cloud? God forgive our human frailty! Though "the spirit is willing," "the flesh is weak."

How many similar contrasts appear between the brightness of life and the gloom of the heart! How strangely the unchecked joy of childhood breaks upon the ear in scenes filled with the grief of men! The laugh of the child, that sound of pure gladness which nothing in nature parallels, sometimes echoes and rings through the chambers that are silent with the presence of death, and the hush of grief. The voice of bright youth may startle us as the last sigh of the departing dies away. The infant looks down through the coffin lid and smiles upon the dead mother's silent face. What bitter, almost tormenting, contrasts may thus be met in life! It is in one sense beautiful to see how God thus imparts gladness to his children; yet who has not felt an added pain, and a new conviction of the sad reality, as he beheld this joyous unconsciousness of the child in the presence of that great change which is the world's especial grief, and which weaves a dark thread of sorrow into the very web and texture of future life? Who of us can only see, at such moments, in the joy

which God causes to flow around human infancy, the image of the kingdom of heaven, of that state of pure faith and love into which our hearts should enter? The brightest symbols of divine love and joy bring a lesson which is too high and pure to be at once received, when we are overwhelmed with grief.

Indeed, not only the joy of the child and of happy hearts, but life itself, its habitual and even its holiest duties, sometimes present painful contrasts to the feeling of sorrowing men. There are sad moments when the voice of friendship is almost unwelcome; when the noblest duties, which have been our previous joy, seem repulsive, and clash with the mood of the spirit; when we are tempted to shrink away from kindly communion with men, and the grand works of mercy which God has committed to human agency, and, with a childish weakness, do nothing in God's world, because severe trial has clouded our life. It is a beneficent Providence which ordains that life's duties shall still claim our service even beneath the pressure of sorrow. It thus leads us away from a selfish absorption in our individual griefs, into beneficent workings and kindly sympathies. It removes us from the close, unhealthy atmosphere of the retirement which we may unwisely love, into the free air of pure and noble action. But who has not felt the oppressive contrast between the world's noblest life and his own grief, as he attempted to obey this call of God? It is well for us to meditate alone until we learn the full meaning of the cup which is offered to our lips; but it is well also, with an equal fidelity, to go forth into the wide field of life's labors and duties. Blessed shall we be if we can look out

from the desolations of our individual life upon men and the world, with a spirit that is more prepared for all heavenly charities, more intensely earnest to relieve the pains of men, and to lead them to that rest whose need we so deeply feel.

“Consider the lilies of the field.” Look out from the present gloom into the surrounding glory, when the day of sadness comes. I do not think that we could rightly receive this counsel if we did not remember from whom it comes. It might seem to imply a want of sympathy with the depth and sacredness of grief, if it were not pronounced by the lips of Jesus. Nature’s ministry alone, uninterpreted, does not meet our want. We look upon the outward world when death is doing its work, and the open grave is waiting for its treasured dust, and we see no tokens of that sympathy for which we long. Though the clouds may weep while we are sad, no voice breaks the silence to soothe and to cheer. We need a ministry that can meet us in our sorrow, and lead us up to those bright manifestations of love which truly comfort us. Jesus never appears more blessed, or more divine, than when we view him as the Consoler of human sorrows; the incarnate Comforter who stoops to meet us in our grief, yet gently leads us up to perfect peace. “By thine agony and bloody sweat,” we exclaim, in our moments of anguish, “thou knowest, Jesus, Master, Comforter, the entire depth of human griefs!” Thou didst drink the bitter cup of trial to its utmost drop, that there might be no experience of suffering which thou couldst not meet! Thou hast looked upon death and felt all its pains! And yet thou dost speak to us of peace; the peace of God that passeth under-

standing; thine own peace, as the portion of the trusting heart! It was the sympathizing friend who wept with the mourning sisters, that said, "Those who truly live shall die no more." His voice came out of great tribulation to say, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Here is Jesus indeed the Mediator, to lead us by gentle steps from the prostration of grief, himself acquainted with grief, to the clear and joyful recognition of God's eternal and unclouded love.

It is sad for us if we permit ourselves to turn away from one bright revelation of God, or one joyful thing in life, when sorrow falls upon us. According to the teaching of Jesus we are to gaze upon them more earnestly in sorrowful hours. Not in a want of sympathy, but in the spirit of the text, we say, "Let not the troubled heart retire long, or exclusively, into the silent and curtained chambers of its grief. Let the sunlight stream into the opened windows. The soul is to commune with the Father's infinite love rather than with its own sadness. Stand not fixedly by the grave to look down into its gloom. Amidst the victories of death, Jesus affirms, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Look upward rather when the loved depart, as the apostles gazed up into heaven when Jesus ascended from their sight. The special grief can be met only by steadfastly turning to these general revelations of grace and truth. God will not explain the particular meaning of our most bitter experience. He does not answer from these opening graves to unfold the mystery of our repeated bereavements. But he encompasses us with tokens of his love to inspire a serene and victorious confidence. Therefore does he reveal

his goodness in the brightness of nature, and in the gladness of youthful and happy hearts. Therefore he incarnates his mercy in the life of Jesus that its perfect glory may scatter the heart's profoundest gloom. Therefore is it said, "God is Love;" and that grand truth is declared which whispers, and prophesies, the solution of all present problems, and future mysteries. Listen to the thousand voices which proclaim this Gospel amidst the incessant changes of life. "Consider the lilies of the field." Hear the sound of gladness in still happy homes. Meditate upon the expressions of the Redeemer's love. Bathe the whole soul in these revelations of pure light. Let them come as assisting angels in the time of need. Can we not trust? Is there not enough to make the soul bow with resigned and almost consenting will—steadfastly to believe, while we meekly await the hour in which the present mystery shall be seen to be, like every thing beside, a mystery of love?

"Consider the lilies of the field." How beautiful is the general lesson which the text suggests! How beautiful is the specific instance which Jesus names to enforce his doctrine! Contrast a lily with a living soul; a perishing flower with the soul whose power and true glory was once illustrated in the spotless purity of Jesus! Shall the flower be so richly blessed, and no eternal benediction be poured out upon the soul? Here Science steps in as the handmaid and servant of faith. Man has studied the perfect workmanship which is displayed even in the grass of the field. He has traced the skill which is manifested in the works of Nature, until, in amazement and in adoration, he has felt that

the majestic heavens do not more distinctly reveal the presence and the love of God than the humblest flowers. The question of Jesus, "Doth God clothe the grass of the field?" means immeasurably more to man after he has learned how wonderfully the grass is clothed. And, therefore, the irresistible answer of the heart, "Shall he not much more clothe you?" rushes upon him with new assurance and power. Does Faith need support and strength? By the side of the grave, out of the sod that covers the most cherished dust, the lily grows and blooms. Take that one flower and look upon it in the spirit of Jesus. Has death removed the brightest flower from your earthly home? Did it vanish in its first beauty, when it was just opening to your view? It has not been blasted; but, because it could not bloom in its full beauty here, it has been transplanted by infinite love into the invisible garden of God. It might not have borne the storms of this rougher world; and, therefore, the same tenderness which clothes the grass of the field has removed it to its more fitting home. Did it disappear when it seemed to approach towards its full perfection, and you beheld the hues of heaven, with scarcely diminished brightness, as you gazed upon its loveliness? Then the charms which became your especial joy, and whose loss you mourn with especial grief, proved that it belonged to a higher sphere. Look up, with new faith in its reality, to that unfading land in which the spirit blooms beneath the eternal smile of God.

What lessons of faith are here in respect to the trials of human hearts, and the loss of those for whom we mourn! What grand purposes may be accomplished

by these varied anxieties and griefs of life ! They do not come to darken the world, or the soul, but to recall us to the omnipresent and ceaseless expressions of the infinite goodness. They come to open our eyes to the boundless tenderness and grace of this Universal Providence ; to inscribe the sentiment of the text upon the enduring tablets of our hearts. When we dwell upon these considerations the mystery of sorrow is almost unrolled. Providence seems more bright as the work of change goes on. The presence of the Father seems more clear and real, as we are more frequently thrown back upon a life of faith. The vanishing of each present blessing is a new invitation to look upward to the throne of God. God clothes the lilies of the field. Shall he not much more bless those who have departed, and those who still remain, in his universal love ? The departed and the left — ascended spirits, and we who are still on earth — are only in different mansions in the same Father's house ; and the partition that separates us grows thinner every day, and shall soon vanish forever from our rejoicing eyes.

AUG. 16, 1846.

XV.

THE LAW OF CONSOLATION.

BUT WHEN THEY DELIVER YOU UP, TAKE NO THOUGHT HOW OR WHAT YE SHALL SPEAK, FOR IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU IN THAT SAME HOUR WHAT YE SHALL SPEAK. — Matthew x. 19.

THESE were words of inexpressible hope. Jesus was sending the Apostles into a ministry encompassed with perils. They were to be brought before governors and kings, and delivered up to councils for punishment. Bitter scorn and cruel scourgings, relentless persecutions in every form, awaited them. They were to go out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Even the fears of the Apostles themselves could not have made the dangers of their future ministry seem greater than the representations and warnings of Jesus. Yet no anxiety was to be permitted for one instant to distract their minds, or to prevent an absolute devotion of thought and feeling to their special work. For in this entire, unreserved concentration of the heart, would be found the only possible preparation for every exigency of their life. If they lived with a single eye to the truth, their

whole body must be filled with light. Then it would not be they who should speak, but rather the truth, speaking in them, and instinctively suggesting an answer of more than human wisdom in every moment of difficulty or trial. As the full fountain will send an abundant stream into every channel which is opened for its waters, so that all-pervading spirit of truth will give a special illumination in each passing hour. Then the disciple would have the same preparation as the Master. Nothing could touch the hem of the garment without an immediate outflowing of virtue and of power. What defence of Jesus could have been so perfect as the simple manifestation of his spirit, which, through its own inherent majesty, caused the rude soldiery to fall backward to the ground in awe! And though it might be unavailing, what answer could that spirit give, except the reply of purest wisdom and divinest love? A soul thus true must make the moments of bitterest opposition times of peculiar manifestations of its own purity. And the cross, the last evil which man could inflict, would become an enduring crown.

I regard the text as the application of a universal law to a particular case. It indicates the sublime law which reigns throughout the entire world of human feeling and human experience; the divine law whose operation brings unfailing strength and life to every obedient soul, in every hour of need.

It is our chief error, that we live with too much reference to particular incidents in human experience. We forget that great principle which alone can lead to an effectual preparation, alike for the ordinary duty and the most extraordinary and overwhelming change. We

sleep until the bridegroom comes ; and then, when the midnight of trial overshadows us, we expect that the lamp of trust will burn brightly in previously untrusting hearts. We hope to meet the exigencies of existence, the hours which most severely test the spirit's strength, by something beside the preparation of daily life. And we are very slow to learn that the habitually prepared life alone can fill the heart with angels, to be ministers of strength in all its agonies. It is a great truth that we can only grow into sympathy with any exalted thought or holy feeling. We cannot go beyond this living experience. Jesus says, " He that climbeth up some other way, is a thief and a robber." We must go in by the door ; the gate of life. In sympathy of feeling, forgetful of this unchanging law, we may seek to impart a bright view of Providence to a soul which was never moved by a deep spirit of trust and love ; but it is like an attempt to point out the glorious prospect from the mountain's top to one who is still sitting in the caves of the earth. The blessed thoughts of trust introduced to a mind which is not their proper home, perish like plants nursed in the heat when suddenly exposed to wintry cold. Separated from the experience which gave them birth, and nourished them into strength, they are like the child which is torn from the mother's breast and given to foes who are leagued to destroy its life. It is long, indeed, before the heart penetrates the deep treasures of strength and consolation which lie concealed even in the truth which it cherishes. The soul does not at once become its home. And even when it is made a household thought, it wears a new expression in every new experience. In the last

interview with the disciples, Jesus called the requisition to "love one another," a *new* commandment. In a new perception of the strength of the ties between his chosen friends and himself, the commandment had new meaning to his heart. And if a familiar truth concealed so long its deepest teaching even from the soul of Jesus, what can these stranger thoughts do to bless us? We may strive to climb up by some other way. But we cannot outrun these living experiences.

Life continually illustrates the principle which we are contemplating. We cite again the instance which we have already named — the experience of grief. What is the meaning of the lamentation in so many sorrowful homes, that "No man really speaks to our sadness!" What is the meaning of the fact that the voice of religion is so often powerless to soothe? What do these things reveal but the fearful truth, that if the lamps are not daily fed by the spirit of life, no ministry of earth or heaven will prepare us to have them trimmed and burning. Human sympathy may scarcely hope to communicate truths entirely unknown before. It must rather aim to bring comparatively forgotten thoughts into clearer view. The sunlight of heaven falls in vain upon the barren rock. If the heart be ordained to darkness by the spirit of the life, only a change of that spirit can set aside the decree. We may catch the words which are true expressions of a trusting soul, and repeat them with our lips. Yet the heart will not find rest. Then we are like the foolish virgins who knocked in vain. The tongue may never cease this idle calling for admittance to the marriage: yet the door will still be shut. The most overwhelm-

ing grief is not so sad as this call for help, to which the unbending law of life must give a perpetual denial. It is Gethsemane, without the strengthening angel.

But we turn in joy to the fact, that the opposite illustrations of the truth may be as bright as these are fearful. It is wonderful to see how all things come to the aid of faithful hearts. As the physical strength is increased by daily labor, enabling man to work with a stronger arm every hour, so the soul which is habitually faithful continually acts with the accumulated might of experience. The artisan derives aid from the observation and skill of years in each new work which he attempts. And thus every faithful experience of previous life contributes the oil to fill the lamp of the soul, when it is called to meet the bridegroom. Not one breathing of prayer fails then to bring its answer of grace. It may not have been heard by a human ear. It may have been the silent supplication of the spirit, in the secret place, where only the Father seeth. But how surely it is rewarded openly, in the energy and peace which are thus imparted to the heart! All these secret aspirations, these movings of pure desire, reveal themselves in the great result, like the hidden springs which feed earth's gushing fountains. Especially is this true in the most trying hours. For whatever calls for the deepest courage and endurance of the soul, of course must unveil most fully its hidden strength.

I look upon those appalling calamities which occasionally startle the world with such thoughts in my mind.* Imagination is overwhelmed by the inconceiv-

* This sermon was first preached on the Sunday immediately after the destruction of the steamboat Lexington, by fire, when Dr. Follen,

able horror of the scene when the flames suddenly flash upon those who are sitting in cheerful conversation, or communing with happy thoughts of home, and they find themselves compelled to choose between destruction by the devouring fire or by the devouring sea. What can sustain the sufferers in such an hour of agony? Not the awful calmness of despair when the inevitable fate is seen. Not those thoughts which had previously been strangers to the heart, and whose voice it does not know. Only one ministry can be effectual then. The deep sentiment of habitual life, the result of years of previous discipline, will reveal its power in the instant of unexpected peril, as well as in the gradual decays of disease. That will tell the sufferer what to do and to speak, and cause him to put on the angel as he puts off the body. We know not how many of those suddenly stricken ones in the catastrophe to which we refer, found it thus triumphant. But one noble spirit was there that was especially prepared for the most appalling vicissitude. One was there whose entire life seemed devoted to what he deemed the truth of God, who had the martyr-spirit to leave home and his native land, to peril present reputation and worldly hopes, in his devotion to truth and freedom. Must it not have been given to such an one, in that hour, what to speak and to do? We know not how to spare a spirit so brave and true from a world which needs its ministry so much. Yet we can look upon its departure with serene and one hundred and fifty others, perished. In the record of one of the conversations in the Memoir of Dr. Follen, the writer has been gratified to find a recognition of the same principle which it was the design of this discourse to unfold.

and triumphant trust. For what may have been to some in that hour as a devouring flame, must have been to that prepared soul a chariot of fire for its ascension.

Indeed, life presents a single alternative to the human heart. It *may* be a continued triumph, wherein it shall be given in every hour what we are to speak and to do. Or it *must* be, to some extent at least, a failure; perhaps an almost hopeless defeat. Life may be a continual victory. It is a joyful promise, that "as our days, so our strength shall be." The promise will be fulfilled when we meet the condition upon which it rests. This great providence of God must be too beneficent to place any burden upon man which he might not have been prepared to bear, by the faithful improvement of previous instructions. It is a Father's Providence. It will not demand a manly work from those who might not have had the strength of men. With what unspeakable benignity it must lead forward every faithful heart. It does not demand a light service. But the inexpressible tenderness of human love could not make the service bear such exact relations to the growing strength. It proposes a work to every living heart, which not only becomes greater in each successive year of present being, but through the endless ages of existence. And it endows us with a capacity for growth by which we may yet attain the energy to accomplish almost godlike works, as it now bestows the power to meet the simpler duties of the present hour. And this gradually increasing work is the divinely adapted ministry to unfold this immortal energy, as the increasing duties of earlier years are the discipline to make us men. A ray of light falls directly upon the

sphere of human duty when this thought is accepted in a lowly and trusting faith. I see how strength may come according to our day by a beneficent law of Providence. Scenes of apparent gloom, days of grief and tears, all that is sad in experience as well as all that is joyous, may share the blessing of the same benignant law. Great responsibilities seem to rise before the soul, as it looks onward to the future. But previous fidelity will impart to it an all-sufficient strength. Great sacrifices may be before it. But the way shall be made smooth at each step of the progress, even though it should be led to a self-sacrifice like that of Calvary. Why do we lament over the scenes where faithful hearts are called to sadness, or martyr-souls are led to suffering? No visitation can come which the faithful soul may not bravely meet. Its tears shall all be wiped away as they flow. Its martyr-suffering shall be its triumph. The great words of hope spoken by Jesus himself to the first disciples, may be applied to every faithful heart. Over all the power of the enemy, and through every experience of trial, it may walk with unfaltering feet towards its rest.

Life may be one continued, ever brightening triumph, or it *must* be a failure. It is the faithful soul to whom it shall be given what to do and to speak in every hour. There are no promises for the unfaithful hearts, either in the days of ordinary duty, or in the moments of extraordinary change. Indeed, there is no conviction more overwhelming than the thought that the unprepared heart must fail. Here we stand, called to manly duties, yet with only an infant's strength. Here we are in maturer years, with undeveloped souls; amidst

glorious teachings which are hidden from our childish eyes ; amidst a great company of angels, whose voices we might have heard, whose messages we might have learned, but whose instructions we are not sufficiently advanced to understand. We not only fail to meet the seasons of peculiar trial. Every day is a failure, from morning dawn to evening shade. I look upon nature with an undeveloped mind, and how few of its teachings are opened to me. I gaze upon life as it flows on, with its manifold changes, its ever-varying instructions. But a superficial mind can attain only a superficial thought, and is unconscious of the profound wisdom and truth lying beneath every thing which it sees. It is blind to this deeper wisdom, as men were blind to the true spirit of Jesus when they looked upon his countenance and listened to his words, yet had no ear to hear, and no eye to see. What truth can be more humiliating than this, that life may be an entire failure, although we suspect it not ; that not one single instruction may be fully apprehended, and not one single duty fully met ; that, at every moment, we are weighed in the balance of an unerring judgment, only to be found wanting ! And if we fail in life's ordinary duties through our unfaithfulness, how can we hope to meet the exigencies which shake even the noblest souls ? Even the soul of Jesus knew an hour of agony. It is not strange that religion often speaks in vain to sorrowing hearts and sorrowing homes. It is a sad truth. Yet it is no mystery. This night of the soul comes by a law as sure as the night in nature. How sad it is to find so many overborne by calamities that could have been brushed away like the dew ! And how much sadder it is to find them desolate

in heavier calamities, and to feel that no ministry of love can open the door which their own unfaithfulness has shut. If the lamps are not trimmed and burning by a previous watchfulness, we shall not be ready to meet the bridegroom when he cometh. In scenes like those in which Jesus wept, or was prostrate in agony, and in prayer for help ; in moments like that in which the exclamation, "My God ! my God ! why hast thou forsaken me !" was heard from the Saviour's lips, what refuge can be found by those who have no sympathy with his faith and trust ?

There is a sublime, far-reaching wisdom in the teaching of Jesus concerning the true preparation for life, which we are peculiarly slow to learn. We scarcely apprehend the state of which he speaks, in which all anxieties for the morrow, all thought and care respecting the possible, or even the certain, changes of future days seem to be forbidden. In his earnest injunction to seek only to be true to the passing moment, and to leave the morrow to take thought for itself, he appears to rebuke all questions concerning the results of present action. To many minds, such precepts seem almost to justify a recklessness which they know not how to reconcile with wisdom. It is only one of the thousand proofs that what may be wisdom with men, is foolishness with God ; and that what may be foolishness with men, is wisdom with God. Human wisdom counsels the low prudence which prepares for special exigencies in the course of life. A divine wisdom leaves them out of view, in that greater preparation of the daily life which comprehends all particulars within its embrace. It is the same wisdom that is manifested in every thing

which Jesus teaches concerning the spiritual life. Man often endeavors to develop particular traits of virtue, to meet particular duties of life, when there is no real regeneration of the heart. Jesus says that out of the changed mind all these traits shall come, naturally as the golden fruits from the living tree. The true prudence is to live in the universal and all-comprehending spirit. Then the truth becomes one with the life. It acts whenever we act. It speaks whenever we speak. It is not an occasional angel, but an indwelling Comforter, never more to leave his chosen temples. In such an entire singleness of heart why should we question what the morrow may bring? Why should we fear to be brought before governors and kings, to be persecuted by man? Why should we tremble at the possibility of vicissitudes which may throw a gloom over other years, or fear that they will not be bravely met, however and whenever they may come? An all-sufficient grace shall visit us in accordance with the eternal law of God. "It shall be given in that hour what we shall do, and what we shall speak."

JANUARY 19, 1840.

XVI.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.



IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH
ARE ABOVE. — Colossians iii. 1.

THERE is one peculiar festival which is consecrated by a majority of Christian believers to the celebration of the Redeemer's resurrection. They not only remember the wondrous fact with perpetual thanksgivings, but they set apart one day of special joy for its commemoration. Once, at least, in the year, a great host of disciples would journey in grateful love to see the place where the Lord lay: to meditate upon the deserted tomb; to gather up the lessons of hope which are thus inspired, and to follow him with a brightening faith in the path of his ascension.

It is a holy pilgrimage. It may be performed silently, in the secrecy of the heart, with no sign to attract the eyes of the world; or it may be celebrated by hosannas in the sacred temple. It has no resemblance to those strange manifestations of sincere, yet

blind enthusiasm, when men rushed on, with arms in their hands, to redeem the holy sepulchre from the power of the infidel. But it is infinitely more beautiful in the sight of heaven. It is a crusade of faith and love, whose origin was sacred, and whose effect may be indeed redeeming. As we gather there in glad and lowly meditations, what *varied* confirmations of faith may come, adapted to meet all peculiarities of feeling and of thought! There are some who are troubled by the operation of the law of death as it appears to the senses. They long for a visible proof that the soul still lives when the eye is fixed in death, and no trace of the living spirit remains; when decay begins its work upon the once animated frame, and all that is seen speaks only of corruption. Let such come and meditate. There is just the ministry which they need to suggest a solution of their difficulties. They may touch the print of the nails. They may put their hands into the side. They find proofs addressed to the senses to assure them that the grave is not the gate of destruction, but of glory. They see that it is like the door of entrance to the marriage feast which is imaged in the parable of Jesus. To those who are without, all may appear mysterious and dark. To those who are within, it is illuminate and bright forever.

Those also, who, upon other grounds, desire a miraculous attestation of the doctrine of immortality, may come and meditate. And they see that he who spoke of an immortal existence in tones of divine assurance, himself wonderfully arose. They know not how to resist the impression that he who was so gloriously endowed with divine power, must have been an uner-

ring witness to divine truth. The spirit of power could not have rested upon any soul except it were sent of God.

And even the more philosophic believer whose faith in immortality is based upon the irresistible conviction that there was a spirit in Jesus which was too divine to die, a spirit which no outward change could destroy, even he cannot look at the empty sepulchre in vain. From the place of the actual resurrection this joyous faith may perhaps be declared in its greatest power. And there the joyful inference, that all who may receive a life kindred to that of the Redeemer shall also tread death beneath their ascending feet, may become more clear and more impressive to his rejoicing heart.

But we do not intend to discuss the various and precise modes in which the literal resurrection may suggest the hope, or give the assurance of immortality. We only recognize the general fact, that, in some way, it may brighten that triumphant thought. We only desire to say that no pilgrimage to the tomb to celebrate the resurrection, can be in vain. Angels come to speak to us whenever we devoutly gather there, to repeat the annunciation, "He is not here, but is risen." And as we hear their testimony, the heavy doubts and fears which pressed us down to the earth, are, in some degree, at least, removed. We gain the joy of a more assured immortal hope. All the graves in the world appear to be unsealed. The forms which we laid there amid dust and decay, rise before our thoughts in unfading bloom. They are not embalmed in spices and myrrh, but they are robed in the garments of an undying faith. They are embalmed in that pure and

living trust, whose power is enduring as the love of God which is at once its source and its support.

It is not, however, the confirmations of our own immortality alone, that are suggested by the resurrection of Jesus, to which the apostles turned in adoring gratitude. They also remembered the directly spiritual influences which flow from this assurance. The glory and rapture of the immortal life itself, the power and impulse of that faith, entranced their imagination and ravished their hearts. This is the view which is presented in the text; the view which they constantly express in tones of deep and fervent eloquence.

There is often an implication in the most enthusiastic statements of the blessedness of an immortal hope, that every thing which has a truly inspiring influence upon the soul is derived from the consideration of its immortality. We do not accept that thought. We should not disparage the present world to heighten the glory of immortality. It is a joy to live even in this present world. Life upon earth suggests abundant reasons for gratitude, and brings abundant impulses to arouse and bless the soul. This present existence alone is beautiful. What a theatre of action is opened in this present world! How beautiful it is in many aspects! How beautiful it is even to the senses! So fair are the thousand scenes which delight the eye, that it almost seems, at times, as if infinite love had toiled to robe this world in charms. Our present dwelling place is adorned for us by the kindness of a God. And when the heart awakes to the perception of the love which this outward beauty reveals, the impression is complete. Indeed, this wondrous beauty is one of the best proofs

of an infinite goodness ; a proof to which no one can be insensible, and which, to some, is a source of intense delight. The fruits needful for man might have been produced without this prodigality of beauty. It is a super-abounding kindness, which both supplies the wants of men, and then adds ceaseless proofs of its benignity in the loveliness of its gifts. This consideration sometimes melts the heart, like the remembrance of that grace which sends messengers to the evil as well as to the good. If the sun goes forth from his chambers like a bridegroom, according to the Psalmist's image, the earth looks up to welcome him in the loveliness of a bride. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like the flowers which she bears upon her bosom. As man looks upon the world there is abundant reason why he should repeat the benediction of its Maker, and say, in perpetual gratitude, "It is good."

How beautiful is this world also to the affections ! For, notwithstanding all the disappointments which come independently of human mistakes and sins, what gushing fountains of tenderness and joy are always flowing in the heart of parent, or friend, or child, to refresh the broad world, alike in the lowliest and in the loftiest homes ; flowing freely, impartially, as the light surrounds and cheers all human dwellings. What bonds of love are woven in life's manifold relationships, in which it seems almost a heaven to be enfolded ! The outward world is beautiful enough to waken the soul to praise. Yet, to the mother's heart, there is no beauty like the gladness which beams over the face of her child. No scene of existence can be called a wilderness when fountains like these are springing up by the

side of all our paths ; when they are flowing perhaps in the greatest purity in shaded and humble scenes, as nature's purest streams often are gushing out in secluded places which man seldom enters.

And how beautiful is this world as a sphere for thought ; for impulses to whatever is great and noble ! What worlds are opened to us here in those grand discoveries which pierce into the earth only to find new treasures of knowledge, and look up to the heavens only to see still grander systems ! What glorious thoughts are enkindled when in our wider, or more minute observation, we everywhere perceive new proofs of the majesty and the tenderness of a God ! What a bright and increasing inheritance is transmitted in the wisdom of all preceding generations ; generations in which wise men have lived, and prophets spoken, and seers of God declared their visions ! We are often prompted to ask, indeed, why man's life on earth should be so brief, when such unexhausted and inexhaustible sources of instruction are spread abroad on every hand. Here alone is enough to charm and to inspire the heart through the utmost length of a patriarch's day. What revelations of the Father are here to delight the soul in the beauty which ravishes the senses, in the affections that fill the heart with joy, in the truths which quicken every noble thought ! It may indeed be a joy to live.

It is not the idea of immortality alone which imparts inspiration to the human heart. Neither is it by depreciating present existence that man obtains the brightest conception of the value of immortality. Far otherwise. When this world is magnified, when all its

lessons are learned, and all its charms are appreciated, we begin to gain a worthy conception of a more exalted life. Then we perceive the full power of the exhortation in the text, and of all similar declarations. This world is only the cradle of the undying soul. Here it is only in its infancy. When I behold the angels of love and mercy which now watch over us, when I see how much of joy there may be in man's present life, notwithstanding the wreck of so many hopes, when I reflect upon the host of bright instructions and spiritual influences that are gathered round him, although, in some things, his view is so limited — when I survey the blessings of his infancy, I am most prepared to predict the glory of his manhood. These scenes of outward beauty, so unspeakably fair, only image that higher beauty which no man can look upon and live. They are bright hints of what is waiting to be revealed when the veil which now conceals so much of this vast temple of God shall be forever rent. These deep affections which gladden all human hearts, and bless earth's countless homes, only intimate the bliss of a more perfect love, in a world in which there shall be "no more death." These inspiring truths which are now unfolded to man's earnest thought but dimly, suggest the bright instructions of that world of perfect light, where the soul may ascend toward the sublimest heights of glory. If these swaddling clothes, wherein we are wrapped in our present existence, are robes of beauty, what will be the glory of the unfading garments of the upper world? If this manger-cradle possesses charms so great, what will be that still more glorious dwelling place?

“ If God hath made this world so fair,
Where sin and death abound,
How beautiful beyond compare,
Will Paradise be found ! ”

Our present existence is a prophecy ; and it points onward to a bright fulfilment, as the dim revelations of God in the earlier ages prophesied more complete disclosures of his truth and love in a later time. And the more clear and beautiful the prophecy, the more distinctly can we conceive the glory which it heralds. Present life is like the morning. And in the clearness and beauty of the light as it gilds the east, we find an assurance of the brightness of the future day. These analogies whisper the most delightful hopes. We argue from the bright present to the brighter and infinite unknown. If our present, transient home has such an exhaustless wealth of beauty and instruction, what treasures must there be in the temple which is eternal in the heavens !

Thus also may we obtain a glimpse of the spiritual greatness which may be attained hereafter. There are stains upon all human robes. There are occasional fears, possibly occasional murmurings, in the most trusting human hearts. There are tears which we do not, or cannot wipe away. There are toils which seem heavy and burdensome, though we may strive to assume the light and easy yoke by true reconciliation to our appointed work. Yet there may come glorious intervals of peace ; “ seasons of clear shining,” in the heart ; hours, when, through the parted clouds, we seem to gaze directly into heaven. There are bright earnest

of a glorious inheritance in many a visiting of inward joy ; in many a moment of peace ; in the confidence of prayer. If these first breathings of grace bring such joy, what will its full and perfect life impart ? If these glimpses of heaven are so bright, what shall we behold when we see the fulness of its light ? We can only repeat the apostolic words, " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Such meditations as these lead us to see the true glory of the hope of immortality. They direct our minds to the same thoughts which were recognized by the Apostles, when they discoursed concerning the Redeemer's resurrection. They meditated upon the grand vision of a more perfect existence, which that event suggested and confirmed. Their enthusiasm was enkindled by the hope that the soul would thus be raised above all the limitations of its infancy. For this reason they spoke of the resurrection, the most perfect symbol of that better life, in words of rapture. This is the meaning of their exhortations when they pleaded with those who are risen with Christ, and who rejoiced in the hopes which his resurrection confirmed, to " seek those things which were above ;" to live worthily of a calling so divine. Well might they plead in fervent, rapturous words. If it is a joy to live even here, if this is a world which is filled with fountains of enjoyment, with impulses to the highest thought — a world which God pronounced to be good — what will it be to be raised " into heavenly places " with the Lord ? We can only exclaim, in trembling, joyful hope, " Now are

we the sons of God, and we know not what we shall be ; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is."

The glory of the Christian doctrine of immortality is not only in the fact that it suggests the idea of duration in our existence. It is not in that alone, although it brings the assurance that while the Sun of all being himself continues to exist, the light which he has kindled in the soul of man shall never be extinguished. Its real glory is, that it confirms the hope of a future perfection of our being which every thing that is beautiful or glorious here helps to shadow forth. The idea of immortality is not to make us soar in fancy to future scenes, pictured in surpassing brightness through an oversight of the rich signatures of God's present love. It is to elevate present existence, and to point to the bright earnestness here of the inheritance for which we hope. Indeed, Jesus speaks of a resurrection to be obtained now, before we are called to tread the valley of the shadow of death. The eternal life of which he discourses may now be gained. The mere idea of duration, the simple thought of a continuance of existence beyond the grave, often seems almost lost in the sublime words which he uses concerning that spiritual condition whereby man may now be already "passed from death unto life." And as in one place he speaks of himself as the Son of Man who was then in heaven, so does he represent all believers who are inwardly united to himself as already possessing the life of the resurrection. The idea of a spiritual life and glory is prominent in his mind when he speaks upon this theme ; a life which involves the continuance of existence as a sure result.

It is a life which *cannot* die. "To be raised with Christ," is "to seek these things which are above." It is to have immortal thoughts to ennoble present scenes. It is to dwell in constant communion with those truths which gushed from the living well in the Saviour's breast. It is to have a divine love to flow into and purify every human affection ; to deepen every generous feeling until the heart become pure, like the spirit of the lowly, and only truly risen one. It is the gradual transfiguration of this earthly life until even the body obtain a kind of spiritual glory, because it becomes the willing servant of the soul, and the law of the members which wars against the law of the mind has partially ceased to reign. The idea of the duration of existence, in itself, is not worthy to awaken the enthusiasm of the soul. It is this spiritual greatness which man may now begin to manifest to the world, as Jesus once manifested a celestial brightness to the eyes of the disciples. God manifested in the flesh ! This is the Christian idea of the "eternal life." This is its symbol, its hope, its aim, and its end.

The world celebrates the Redeemer's resurrection. It goes to the deserted tomb to swell the anthem of triumph, because the grave has lost its victory, and death has been deprived of its sting. It is good to meditate upon the outward and wondrous fact. It is good to go to the sepulchre with a lowly heart, although we go with a partially benighted thought. But we would that all believers might remember what is the worthy end of such meditations, and what is the true celebration of the Lord's resurrection. The festival of the resurrection is truly kept, when men come not only

in gratitude for a ransom from the power of death, but also for the hope of a now unknown spiritual greatness which they may hereafter realize in the progress of their being. The festival is truly kept, when faith in immortality not only dries the tears of bereavement, but transforms the heart by its sanctifying influence. The festival is truly kept as humanity is raised above the power of the second death, and ascends into "heavenly places" in its thought, and feeling, and prayer. Saviour! who art the true resurrection and the life, as well as the deliverer from the grave and its gloom, come to us in power, until we can keep that festival in newness of life. Come, until we can keep it in that spirit which is indeed immortal, because it is "the life of God in the soul of man."

APRIL 23, 1843.

XVII.

PRESENT EXPERIENCE OF IMMORTAL LIFE.



I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE ; HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE. — John xi. 25.

It is scarcely possible to read the record of the conversation of Jesus with the mourning sisters, and of the scene at the grave of Lazarus, without an increasing faith and a profounder reverence. The subject of the history is one of overwhelming wonder. But the entire narration is marked by an indescribable simplicity and naturalness of expression, which is its own sufficient witness. Nature speaks in every line ; and to read is to believe. No passage in the Gospel histories is characterized by a more divine simplicity ; and none represents Jesus in a greater moral majesty. He was communing with a grief that touched the springs of sympathy in his own breast. We are told that “ Jesus wept.” He stood at the grave of friendship. The conquest of the tomb was apparently complete. A stone

was placed upon the cave in which the body was laid. Yet there, in the presence of death itself, amidst all the circumstances that combined to give them impressiveness, he uttered those words of calm majesty which have been selected for the text. There he uttered that triumphant declaration which proclaimed an eternal victory over death and the grave, in a tone of serenity and of majesty which attested the presence of the Son of God.

The text is not only impressive in its connection with the circumstances of the hour when its Gospel first gladdened human hearts, but it suggests one of the noblest doctrines which Christianity affirms. It is more than an authoritative assertion of the doctrine of the resurrection. It intimates the possibility of an inward, present experience of immortal life. It teaches that holiness of life brings with it convictions of man's immortality, which grow more clear at every step of spiritual progress; so that, as we advance towards the life of Jesus, we have an inward witness that the soul can never die. We gladly turn to contemplate the possibility of that blest experience. We desire for the moment to listen to the tones of that inward witness which, amidst the apparent victories of the grave, testifies of an immortal hope to faithful hearts. We desire to consider the strong assurance which it gives to lowly souls; an assurance, which, to the true child of God, sometimes seems like the actual revelation of the splendors of the coming world.

It is a self-evident proposition, that obedience to the laws of our being must open to our view distinct glimpses of our nature and destiny. Every creature of

God has a law inscribed upon its constitution which it was made to fulfil. And every circumstance of its existence, every minute influence which affects its life, only tends to the fulfilment of this divinely appointed destiny. The trusting heart declares this as a direct inference from its faith in God. And every advance in knowledge, every research of science, brings new demonstrations of its truth. The soul may accept that conclusion as the expression of an everlasting covenant between God and man. Indeed, if we could once read aright the laws of our nature, if these capacities for undying affections and unlimited advancement could unfold themselves in true manifestations of their possible majesty, we should feel that no coming flood, no apparent destruction could sweep us away, while those laws were unfulfilled. We should feel an inward assurance that some ark would always be provided to bear us safely on the very bosom of the flood towards the eternal mount of God.

It is a strangely mingled being — this union between the flesh and the spirit. This undying soul, whose light, as holy men affirm, shall remain while the throne of God endures, is united to a body in which the elements of destruction begin their work, even in the cradle. The life of the flesh is developed first. Oftentimes it becomes so intense and vigorous that the spiritual life is dwarfed and almost destroyed. This body, which is made to transmit all quickening influences to the soul, — the splendors of God's love in nature through the eye, and the intimations of his truth and grace through every sense, in order to waken the heart to new perceptions of his eternal goodness, — this body may be

come the spirit's tomb. The very God in man sometimes appears to serve the flesh, and to toil to invent new indulgences for craving passion. How can man then realize the existence of a nature more divine? As well might we expect to convey to the mouldering body a perception of the outward world of beauty, as to give to the dead soul a conviction of its own immortality. But could the soul of man really speak, could it unseal the grave of spiritual death in which it is so often laid, and come forth with a power before which its once sovereign passions would be vanquished and put to flight, then its own diviner life would reveal its nobler nature and destiny. Then the law which it was made to fulfil would appear in distinct and shining characters. Could it once live in that fidelity which rejects the kingdoms of the world, if they must be purchased by sin against truth, could it once worship in that fervor of prayer which flies to God, as the bird to its nest, this undying life would begin to be known. Every step in the spirit's progress brings a new conviction that we were as truly made for a spiritual as for a material world; and that "man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Then would each step of advance towards an abiding rest in the Father's bosom, bring a new vision of the glory which we had with him, in his eternal purposes of love. The great declaration, that "whosoever doeth the will shall know of the doctrine," would here also be verified. From such a mountain height of attainment, man can see, even now, the land of promise. The bright faith comes in with every heavenly thought and every living feeling, that as the

tree was made to bring forth fruit, each after its kind, so the soul of man was made to bloom and to bear its fruit forever in the Paradise of God.

We often mistake the meaning of Jesus when he spoke of the resurrection, and of eternal life, and thus overlook an important feature of his teaching. To us those declarations suggest the idea of particular events in our future being. To him they represented a state of the heart; that life of God in the soul of man which brings a conviction of immortality as its natural consequence. It is with this as with the doctrine of man's salvation. Jesus does not discourse particularly concerning future salvation. He speaks of the regeneration of the human heart; a present redemption which involves future salvation as a sure result. We apply the phrase "eternal life" to a state which cannot exist until the body dies. Jesus applied it to the purified heart, which, even in this world, may dwell in immortal thoughts and divine affections, and draw its life from "Siloa's brook, that flows fast by the oracles of God;" to a condition of the soul in which it may triumph over external change; a condition in which the deep affections, fixed upon God, may rest undisturbed amidst outward vicissitudes, as the depths of ocean remain serene amidst the tumults of the passing storm. He referred to a state of mind to which there can be "no more death;" a state which must always bring the secret persuasion that death can only be a change to a deeper life. We can give no other interpretation to the peculiar form of expression in the text, and in other similar passages. Jesus represents the resurrection and the life as to be actually experienced here. His

own divine life which raised him into heavenly places in his communion with God, was the true resurrection. That resurrection will be known on this side of the grave, by all who obey the law of their immortal nature and gain the Redeemer's spirit. And this explains the fact that Jesus does not attempt, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, to *prove* the doctrine of immortality. He endeavors to awaken the soul to a consciousness of immortality, rather than to present an argument in its support. Logical arguments avail but little while man knows nothing of eternal life in his experience. Jesus calls man directly to that spiritual resurrection which prepares him to look upon death and the grave as having no victory, and no sting, for the living soul. One thing alone was necessary; that men should come forth from the graves of sin. Then the spirit of truth within their hearts, that blessed Comforter, would whisper an assurance to remove all their doubts.

Here we see the process by which Jesus brings life and immortality to light. He declares the truth indeed, in his words; and the trusting disciple rests upon that assurance, when nothing more may be seen. But he gives a higher vision still. When we regard him as the one divinely given example of the life of the soul, we perceive how this great doctrine of immortality may become clear to the actual consciousness of the heart. We see how the soul may be raised above the gloom of the shadow of death. The idea of an existence beyond the grave has always been present, in some form, in the mind of the race. Often it has been only as a flickering ray of hope in the night of sorrow. Still

its light has fallen, never perhaps to be utterly extinguished, upon all the graves in which men have laid those who were most dear to their heart. But it did not practically change the face of death. Death was the king of terrors still. It was viewed as an angel of destruction, and not the angel of mercy who takes all the children of the race in his arms, and bears them to the Father's throne. But the victory of the grave is past when we look up to Jesus as the true example of the spirit's life. In that divine humanity, life and immortality are indeed brought to light. We see the soul entering upon a true spiritual resurrection; proving itself to be a partaker of the divine nature, and therefore a sharer of its endless life. The whole creation groaned for one such manifestation. The world had not seen it. It could not have seen it through the cloud of sin which shrouded, more or less, every child of the race. But in the light from the life of the sinless one, the truth becomes plain. That wonderful being whom I perceive to be my brother, according to his own blessed word, is so pure, and so divine, that he also seems to be my God. And I believe that his last loving prayer declares the destiny and end of all spiritual beings; "that they who believe may all be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, and be with me where I am." Is not that a Gospel of joy to blinded, crushed human nature; a Gospel which must make earth and heaven glad? And will not its revelations of life and love become familiar thoughts, as sympathy with the soul of Jesus becomes deep and living? The countenances of men are instantly changed by its revelations. They are not

children of the dust, but children of God. They have prodigally wandered, indeed, and have been feeding with the swine. Yet they may return, in that self-abasing penitence and love to which many sins shall be forgiven, to enter upon an enduring fellowship with Jesus. Morning breaks upon the tomb when such a revelation comes; a morning to which no night shall succeed. "Thanks be to God who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

We often ask, with trembling hearts, for proofs of this doctrine of the soul's immortality. We need them to confirm our often wavering, and almost vanishing faith. We may not realize it, but the proofs which practically sustain the soul, are found in whatever brings us into union with the spirit of Jesus. Nothing else can write the truth within the heart, that it may become an ever-present light amidst the decays of time. Every victory over passion, every successful struggle to break the chain of sin, brings a new and living witness of the possibility of so divine a destiny. Indeed, although it may appear, and is, a sentiment too vague to be named as a reliance for the heart, yet every thing which deeply moves the spirit, tends to waken the consciousness of an immortal life. The majesty of Nature amid scenes of grandeur or of tumult, calls forth the conviction of something in the soul more majestic far than they; a power of thought and life which takes up the isles as a very little thing. The great works of genius which remain unharmed through revolutions of centuries and empires, whisper of the greater mind which fashioned them, which must be more enduring than themselves. And the appre-

ciating heart feels the assurance of its relationship to that exalted and enduring mind. These, and many other ministries, awaken thoughts that transcend the bounds of time, and wander through eternity.

But we turn from these things to meditate again upon the more perfect assurance. Would you gain a bright faith in immortality? Dwell in the life of lowly prayer till your intimate relationship to God becomes a fixed and present thought. Live in that immutability of principle which treads the world's enticements beneath its feet. This practical assurance of immortality, the proof which grows from the life of the heart, may be manifest to those who know nothing of human wisdom, but who humbly dwell in the divine love. It may be hidden from the wise and prudent, while it is revealed to babes. It is perceived anew in every increase of fervent feeling, in every manifestation of the power of the soul in the lives of those around us. God has blessed the world with many such confirmations of its truth. They are found in that sweet spirit of trust which triumphs amid the wastings of disease; which clothes the face with a heavenly beauty as it loses its earthly bloom, and causes the decays of nature to seem like a gradual and bright ascension. They are found in the histories of holy men who have kept the faith; in those who were ready to be offered up, and who gloried in their martyrdom. And when we commune with this cloud of witnesses, and receive something of their spirit, especially when we commune with him from whom they, and we alike, receive the truest inspiration, we can look up from the grave where we have laid child or friend, in the strong agony of human

grief, with an unfaltering trust. Then can we say, "He is not here, but is risen; and hath ascended to his Father and our Father; to his God and our God."

It is good to meditate upon this inward assurance which grows ever more clear and bright, as the spirit of Jesus regenerates the soul. But the question arises amidst such meditations, is there no positive assurance for men while still in a comparatively unspiritual life? We cannot look, a multitude exclaim, we cannot look with this clear sight directly into the spiritual world. Is there nothing that may place our feet upon a rock which the waves of time cannot overwhelm? Thanks be forever given, God imparts to our spiritual infaney the instruction which it needs. The declarations of Jesus, the words of him who was clothed in the majesty of wisdom and of miracle, come to the yet undeveloped soul, like the words of a friend upon whom we implicitly rely. Here the trusting heart may rest, even before the inward witness has clearly spoken. And this reliance may often become the first impulse to that spiritual life whose confirmations are so clear and precious. This may be the basis on which it rests. Yet blessed as may be the work of this outward sanction, indispensable as it may be to give stability to faith, we only state the conviction of all believing hearts when we say, that its proper office is only to quicken to a true, spiritual life, and the assurance which is thus obtained. It is comparatively valueless when it stands alone. And therefore it is, that no process of argument, no merely outward reliance alone, no mere faith in the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, ever brought a confidence that could stand unshaken when the rushing tides of

grief were beating upon it. This external authority may be indispensable as the foundation for a better life, and a spiritual hope. But this alone is futile, and vanishes into air, in the hour of greatest need.

It is easy to see why our faith is so faint and dim. It is easy to see why immortality is a dream, and heaven an empty name. It is not strange that our strength should fail under the burdens of calamity, and that our faith should have no power to wipe away these gushing tears. The mere study of the record of the Redeemer's life and ministry, although it should lead us to feel an entire certainty respecting his resurrection, will not remove this practical difficulty, or give substance to our hope. The evil is far deeper. The soul has not lived in a spiritual life until spiritual truths, affections, joys, have become great realities. The existence of a spiritual world has not thus been attested by experience. This mortal will not put on immortality, until, in a practical and abiding conviction, death is swallowed up in victory. A purely spiritual life is described as a state in which "there shall be no more death." The wise man seeks at once this all-triumphant spirit. He strives to gain the true and spiritual resurrection by communion with the life of the Son of God, until he can realize in his own experience the joyful declaration, that "whosoever *liveth*, and believeth in me, shall never die."

FEBRUARY 6, 1842.

XVIII.

IMMORTALITY OF THE HUMAN HEART.

JESUS SAITH UNTO HER, MARY. SHE TURNED HERSELF, AND SAITH UNTO HIM, RABBONI, WHICH IS TO SAY, MASTER. —John xx. 16.

THE text tells us how Jesus made himself known to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection. She lingered by the deserted sepulchre, exclaiming amidst her tears, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Jesus himself came near unobserved, and addressed her. But she was still gazing in grief and wonder upon the tomb, and did not instantly recognize his voice. He then repeated the simple name, Mary. And by that one word, spoken in the same tone of affection which had so often greeted her ear before his crucifixion, the wonderful and enrapturing secret was revealed. At once she prostrated herself at his feet in such intensity of joy that she could only exclaim, "Rabboni, which is to say, Master."

When we read the simple accounts of the Redeemer's resurrection, we are profoundly impressed by the per-

fect harmony between the character of the risen Lord and the spirit which was manifested in every word and act throughout his ministry. Jesus is represented as appearing only in a few instances between his resurrection and his ascension. The accounts of these appearances are extremely brief. But they are marked by a wonderful and unpretending simplicity which at once commands our reverence, and which it seems impossible for the art of man to imitate. In each word of Jesus the same pure spirit breaks upon us with the clearness of the sunbeam as it suddenly lights up the thickly clouded sky. He speaks to Mary ; and the same divine love which had gained her whole heart, and caused her to linger by the cross, and to come early to the tomb to embalm the body with spices and with tears, — the same spirit which she had loved before, reveals itself to her view. He appears to Peter ; sinning, yet repenting Peter ; so fallen, and yet so true ; whom the question of the maid-servant in the Judgment-hall frightened into the denial of his Lord, and whom one glance of grieved love melted into tears of contrition. And how wonderfully is the character of the Son of God revealed his unbending strictness and his divine compassion, also, in the thrice repeated question, “ Simon, lovest thou me ? ” — that the erring disciple might re-affirm his love as oft as he had uttered his denial. He breaks bread in the presence of the two disciples who walked with him to Emmaus, as he had often broken it before. How much is told in the simple declaration that he was instantly “ known to them ” in the breaking of bread ! He appears to the disciples when gathered together to give them their commission. And then, in accordance

with the feeling which enfolded the Samaritans in the embrace of fraternal love, and saw the children of the same Father everywhere, he says, "Go into *all* the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." But we need not adduce additional instances. Indeed, this singular harmony of spirit is not to be described. It is felt when we read and meditate. Then we see that each declaration of the risen Lord manifests the same love that characterized the once living Jesus. His countenance wears the same expression which it wore before the stillness of the tomb settled upon his features. The chill of the grave has not destroyed one deep personal affection. Death has come and passed; death in all its agony, — lingering, torturing crucifixion. Yet it has left no trace of its power. It was only a momentary ripple upon the serenest sea. The same garment covers the earthly and the risen life of the blest Redeemer. It is a coat without a seam. Death indeed seems to be abolished when the same life greets me from beyond the tomb. Where then is the sting of death? Where the victory of the grave?

The same Jesus that spoke in the homes of Palestine, that lived, and loved, and suffered, returns. He bears the impress of the same heart, as his hands and his side bear the marks of the nails and of the spear. The fact suggests a conception of the spiritual world which it is delightful to cherish. Let us attempt to gain a glimpse of its nature, and of the hopes which it confirms.

Men err in two opposite ways in their speculations respecting the future world. Some suppose that the future life is entirely different from the present. They look to that hidden land where the trusting rest in the

bosom of faith, and imagine that a vast chasm yawns between them and us, over which the characteristics of humanity can never pass. They disconnect the present and the future, the life of earth and of heaven. They habitually feel, and almost affirm, that the elements of this higher existence can never be manifested amidst earthly scenes; and that the elements of the earthly life can never endure and shine amidst the more spiritual glories of the heavens. They do not regard the visible and the invisible world as different parts of one whole, but as radically opposite in nature. And they look upon the passage into that unseen realm as something more than a mere transition into new scenes. It is rather a re-construction, a new creation, of the spirit itself, to prepare it for a new and wholly different sphere.

Others tend towards the opposite mistake. They regard the future as too nearly resembling the present being. It is not a spiritual resemblance alone of which they conceive. Human thought cannot exaggerate that resemblance; for the nobler elements which glorify true souls on earth are identical with the divine life of heaven. But they conceive of a future which too nearly resembles the outward, earthly part of present existence. Imagination has often pictured heaven as consisting chiefly of outward splendors. It has dreamed of the golden streets, and the glittering crowns, of the New Jerusalem, as if they were essential parts of its glorious life. The idea of intense outward delight, such as the world can never impart, has given the form and the character to all its visions. Strange that man should dream of outward beauty as constituting a heaven for

the soul. Though he gain the whole world, he cannot silence, or satisfy its longings. Amidst the greatest prodigality of external gifts, man experiences the same undying thirst, and cries for water to cool his burning tongue. The fancied splendors of heaven could never satisfy his infinite desires. Those desires find their only rest in the infinite love of God.

In his imaginations of the future, man has sometimes carried the senses across the river of death. But this mistake is too gross to remain with a spiritual faith. The more frequent mistake consists in supposing that the characteristic affections of the human heart, which are built up in the closest relationships of present life, will be weakened, or left behind, when the soul crosses the mysterious flood. There is a theory of the future world which is too abstractly spiritual. It not only supposes that the body sleeps forever in the grave, but it regards these strong and tender personal affections, the manifold ties of earthly friendship, the wreaths of blessed feeling that crown existence here with beauty, as destined to perish at the door of the tomb. It considers them as merely the attributes of our earthly life. When the spirit rises it must leave them behind, as the risen Lord left the grave clothes when he ascended from the sepulchre. All personal attachments and remembrances must be outgrown in that impersonal, purely spiritual existence. When we are children of earth we must think and feel as children. But when we rise into the higher state in which every lower affection is swallowed up in a supreme, absorbing love of God, the remembrance of the previous relationships of the heart will be outgrown, as the toys of infancy are outgrown when we become men.

Some, indeed, have carried this impersonal idea further still. They have insisted that it presents the true law, the divine ideal, of our present life. They have called the special affection of earthly homes a low and partial sentiment, and insisted that the heart ought to cherish an equal love towards every member of the vast family of God. Man may maintain such a theory in hours of cold and abstract thought. But when his heart is once awakened to love, he instantly rejects such philosophical speculations. We refer to them now, however, to say that they are not to be rejected, if the future is a state of impersonal feeling, such as some imagine it to be. The grand, and only just aim of earthly existence, is to make this world an image of the heavens. We must pray, and labor, that the will of God may be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. The law of the future, higher life, should be now accepted and obeyed. If these filial and fraternal attachments, if these pure earthly friendships do not survive in the life of the resurrection, let us now begin to destroy them in our breasts. Let the sweet bonds which make home the place of special joy now be rent. Crucify these deep, yet tempting personal affections. Remember the declaration, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." If the truly spiritual idea of life requires that we should "leave father and mother, brother and sister, wife and child," in this stern sense of the word, take up that cross in unflinching obedience. It must be a sin to cherish, or to tolerate, the imperfections, the unspiritual tendencies, which the soul must leave behind, in order to enter into a higher world.

I receive a better doctrine when I read the record of the Redeemer's resurrection. The *man* Christ Jesus rose when the Son of God burst the gates of the tomb. Instead of supposing that this cold, impersonal spirit ought to become our law on earth, we do not believe that it is the law of the heavenly world. Our particular affections will survive in our future being. They will not remain in their undue, and often unbalanced manifestation, to exclude even the love of Christ and of God. Still they are indestructible elements of the soul. The love which spoke to Mary when she anointed the feet of Jesus, and washed them with her tears, in the fulness of her penitence, must have survived to speak to her in the heavenly world with equal fervor. The disciples would not have recognized their Lord when he arose, if he had not manifested the same peculiar affection for his chosen friends and followers. They would not have recognized their Lord, if he had not spoken in the same love to John who formerly leaned upon his breast. The marks of the nail and of the spear would not have convinced them of his identity, if the peculiar features of his soul had been obliterated. Humanity rises from the tomb; the sympathies, the affections, the purer friendships, the nobler feelings which make up the best life, and the enduring charm, of human nature. Humanity rises from the tomb; not dispossessed of its heart, but with the same heart quickened to an intenser life, and clinging more tenderly to those who had been most fondly cherished in the days of earthly existence. These better sympathies do not perish. They are strengthened and forever glorified.

The same Jesus who was slain ascends from the sepulchre. Indeed, we cherish the idea that we shall never realize the depth and power of these pure friendships, these particular affections, until we enter upon the life of the resurrection. The central life of the spiritual world must be a pure, transcending love of God; a love beyond what eye hath seen, and heart hath now conceived. But what is this absorbing love of God? How must it be manifested? Will it annihilate and swallow up the affections which unite kindred souls? There can be no such clashing between the great and indestructible tendencies of our nature. Christianity teaches that, "He who loveth God, must love his brother also." The natural manifestation of this central, spiritual love, is the affection which flows out towards individual hearts. If this central fountain be deep, the streams must be full. Here is a law which must reign in all spheres of spiritual existence.

"Ah ! this is the bliss of the mansions above,
To stand near the throne, as the *angels* of love."

The special affections of the human heart will be purified from their earthliness when they become simple outpourings of the supreme love of God. They will be free from the selfishness which often pervades the friendships of earth, and perverts our apparently disinterested attachments. But when the dross is purged away, the pure gold will shine with new lustre. The spiritual ties will become more intense when all earthly admixtures are removed. Indeed, the glory of this pure, celestial love of God, is manifested in the fulfilment of the innumerable ministries

of mercy which are permitted to finite spirits in this all-beneficent Providence. We do not know how many new relationships of feeling they may form in their ascending life. Yet every new relationship will increase their capacity of love. They will embrace old objects of affection with greater fervor for every new tie which they may form. The transient unions, the superficial attachments of the world, will then pass away. They are fast passing now. But those which are true and deep, must be eternal. They shall shine like the stars forever and ever.

The risen and the once living Jesus are one. Every earthly and sensual attribute of being must decay in the grave. It can destroy nothing more. The narrow stream of death is not like the fabled river of *Léthe*. The soul does not drink the waters of oblivion when it passes over it, and wash away from the memory all the feelings and relationships of the past. Transient feelings are left behind, but the inherent attributes of the spirit remain. Our theme, indeed, affords a basis for startling admonitions as well as for joyful hopes. The same Jesus whom the disciples had loved, arose. Death does not chill the blessed sympathies of humanity. Neither does it open new fountains of feeling and life. There was no new expression upon the countenance of the Redeemer when he came from the grave to look again upon his devoted followers. What had been, appeared again. Death can neither destroy nor create. The chill of the grave cannot cause plants of righteousness to grow which had not previously begun to live. There is no magic in the tomb to change the stained garments of earth into pure and spotless

robes. The transition into another sphere of being cannot be a regeneration. The streams of spiritual joy in the life of ascended souls took their rise on earth, in the mountain-heights of self-denying virtue to which they bravely climbed, bearing the cross upon their shoulder. They were poured along the paths of present life with an often obstructed, yet constant flow. And, therefore, they now become living wells, pure as the crystal sea around the throne. The silent sepulchre possesses no power to save.

We do not forget the serious aspect of our theme. But we dwell upon the hopes which it confirms. We look up to the heaven which it reveals. The *man* Christ Jesus re-appears. Every thing that is lovely here will be seen again. Not one true affection can perish. Death is not that great change in the nature of our being which some have imagined it to be. I meditate upon the great company of the departed. I think in sadness of the lost who were once clasped to the heart. I go to their graves to hear the declaration of Christian faith, "They are not here, but are risen." And what has risen? Are these risen souls the same whom we knew on earth? The same Jesus arose. What has risen? All that was true and lovely in friendship, all that was generous and noble in the hearts that were once enshrined in the decaying dust, all that made human affections tender and holy and deep. These risen spirits have not parted with their identity, and lost the power to recognize me again. They seem rather to call me again by name as of old, in the silence of meditation. They speak as Jesus spoke to Mary while weeping by the tomb. What has risen?

Not a form of life which breaks the previous ties of the heart, or severs its connection with those who still remain on earth. It is expressively and beautifully said, "Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for us." The spirit which found its joy in perpetual ministries of mercy on earth, will not cease to act upon us when it ascends into closer communion with the God of love. The devotion that prayed and pleaded for us on earth, prays and pleads the more in a spiritual world. The gulf between the present and the future is not so broad as men have often dreamed.

"The saints on earth, and those above,
But one communion make ;—
One family, we dwell in Him ;
One church above, beneath ;
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death."

What has risen? Come and see the same Jesus re-appearing to greet his followers. Behold in that fact the image of a truth which reason and Christianity alike confirm. Come and see, and fear the grave no more. It is forever unsealed. Do not fear it when friends go down into its silence. It cannot destroy the friendships which have been deep and true. Do not fear it when you draw near to its gates, except as sinfulness must fear both life and death. Do not fear it, except as unrest, unreconciliation of heart, which is itself perdition, must fear, when it remembers that it must carry its undying worm wherever it may go.

APRIL 30, 1843.

XIX.

ACTION, NOT REPOSE, THE HEAVENLY REST.



THEY REST NOT DAY NOR NIGHT. — Revelation iv. 8.

MEN often speak of the life of heaven with rapturous hope, although they do not possess distinct or rational conceptions of its nature or character. They invest it with every conceivable charm. They use the word “Heaven” as the symbol of every thing that is fair and lovely to the imagination. Throughout every form of his discipline, man anticipates, in heaven, the particular deliverance or triumph for which he longs. When burdened by the toil of life, he rejoices in the hope of heavenly repose. When tried by questions which he cannot answer, he anticipates the light which heaven will pour upon the mysteries of Providence and of life. When saddened by vicissitude, or racked by grief, he imagines the enduring joys of a world of unbroken peace. As the Jew of old, amidst his wanderings and captivities, was cheered by the hope of a coming Messiah, so, amidst the difficulties and sorrows of present

life, man is cheered by the hope of a deliverance in heaven. Yet when we scrutinize these expressions of praise and hope, and attempt to discover their basis, they often seem to vanish into a dim and unsubstantial vision. Sometimes the Christian does not more clearly apprehend the nature of the heaven of which he sings, than the Jew apprehended the character of the expected Messiah whose praise he chanted. To many, heaven is a vague splendor. It is a glorious imagination ; not a substantial, well-defined conception. By rapturous exclamations, men frequently attempt to compensate for the absence of clear and positive thought. They talk of the City of God, with its jewelled walls, its pearly gates, its golden streets, its brilliant crowns, until they are dazzled and blinded by these conceptions of outward splendor, and do not distinctly perceive the nature of its employments, or the character of its life.

It is unfortunate that our ideas of heaven should be confused and dim. Clear, well-established convictions of its nature, would invest it with a new reality, and give to it a greater power to overcome present temptations. It is the proper office of the imagination to adorn the idea of heaven with every charm that can attract the heart. But, first, there must be the distinct idea itself, to furnish a foundation upon which the imagination may build its bright and glorious conceptions. Then heaven would appear real both to the mind and to the heart. It would not seem like an airy vision, a mansion of clouds, but like a city built upon a rock, with its towers and palaces already discerned from afar, reflecting the glorious light ; a city upon which the

traveller may fix his eyes until he enter its pure and beautiful abodes.

It is unfortunate that our conceptions of heaven should be confused and dim, but it is not strange. It is a result of the imperfection of our present life. When man begins truly to live, he begins to understand the nature of the soul's life, and to receive prophetic hints respecting its future and higher existence. In the growth of the infant tree, we see the germs of its future majesty, when it has been nourished by the dews and rains of coming years, and its roots have gone down deep into the earth, and its branches rise towards the sky. So in the true growth of the infant soul, we behold the germs of its diviner greatness, when it shall have received the dews of heaven in time and in eternity. The veil between the present and the future is not a wall of adamant which human thought cannot pierce. It becomes like glass to living faith. Each new gush of love in the heart removes another scale from our eyes. Must not the purity of heart which sees God, impart the power to see the glorious life for which his accepted children may hope? Must not the man who understands the spirit of love in his own experience, who knows the nature of the prayer which it breathes and the service to which it prompts, be able to look beyond the grave to apprehend its future service, and to conceive of its heavenly prayer? If there has been no such experience in the heart, we must be as ignorant concerning the life of the spiritual world as the unborn child concerning our life on earth. In one sense there will always be mystery in connection with our future existence. There are mysteries into which even the angels

desire to look. Still the future life is not mysterious in the unqualified sense in which that term is often used. Let us obtain the light which purity of heart can give us now. Let us rise into fellowship with the Son of Man, who was in heaven while he walked in Palestine, before we term that a mystery which may only seem impenetrable because our eyes are closed.

“They rest not day nor night.” One bright feature of the heavenly life is disclosed in the text. The theme which it suggests may appear, at first, only to lead to a visionary speculation; but it involves the most strictly practical truths. It unfolds to our view the central life, the law and the heart, of heaven. The difference between the present and the future world is not, that this world is a place of work and labor, and the future a scene of repose, a couch of down. The difference is, that in the future the mind will never slumber, and activity will become more intense. The deep waters of affection in the human heart do not stagnate when the spirit enters into a nobler world. There the fountains of feeling will be really broken up, and its streams be poured forth in a previously unimagined strength, to fill every channel of action into which an inexhaustible love can flow. The touch of the angel of death does not paralyze the soul as it benumbs the body. It sends the body to its eternal sleep; but it imparts to the spirit an electric fire. In proportion as future scenes excel the present in every imaginable charm, so the heavenly life transcends the earthly in every noble work. In comparison with the intense activities of heaven, the majestic labors of earth will appear like the sports of childhood. The difference between the present and the future, we

repeat, is not that here is action, and hereafter, repose. There is no night in the heavenly world. The tired mind, wearied now with the effort to grasp great truths of God, exhausted by the attempt to climb to nobler heights of knowledge, need not slumber there. The heart worn now by the depth of its feeling, by the out-pouring of its strong affections, need not seek refreshment there in unconscious sleep. There the gates need not be closed, that the exhausted springs may again be filled. There the "tired wing" need not fold itself to rest. It will not be wearied, and will require no rest. But, on and on, the soul will fly, strengthened and refreshed in its course, in an eternal approximation towards the mind of God.

This is not a vision of fancy merely. The speculation rests upon a simple and unalterable law. The ladder by which we climb towards it is securely fixed upon the ground. It is only by intense activity that man's nature can be developed. As the arm gains vigor by daily toil, so the mind increases its power by laborious thought. The buried talent is not taken away by an arbitrary judgment. We behold the law by which that judgment comes when we see the idle hand become weak and withered. But to "him that hath, shall be given." New energy is the result of toil. Here is a glorious law whose full promise is expressed in the words of Scripture which invite us to become "Heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." The ancient sentence which condemned fallen man to labor, revealed the process to reinstate him in the lost Eden. Humanity becomes divine by the development of the powers which toil secures. How deeply laid in

the nature of man are these divine words of Jesus which call us to a service of unwearied love, to a tireless philanthropy! What a sublime fact is covered by the expression, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." There is a fearful depth of meaning in the declaration, "That the soul that sinneth," against this law of growth, "shall die." But when man pours forth the treasures of his mind and heart in ministries of love, when he thus truly lives, in the blessed words of Jesus, "he shall never die!"

Can the inaction which brings death on earth, become glory and life in heaven? God has not ordained that two conflicting principles shall produce the same result. The law of growth which we now begin to understand, will be revealed hereafter in an unimagined clearness. What spiritual elements possess such intense activity as those that enter into our conceptions of the heavenly life! What is so active as thought? Who can conceive the rapidity of its flight, when it is unincumbered by, or outgrows, its fleshly wing? What is so swift as love to do its darling work? The great law of activity still reigns above; thought and love develop there their supernatural energies; and, therefore, heaven always gushes out in new springs of life—in a full flow of power and blessedness. "They rest not day nor night."

The idea of a more intense activity in the heavenly world is based upon the immutable law of the moral universe. Notwithstanding the different opinions which have seemed to prevail, men still predict this activity as the characteristic of a higher spiritual life. The name which is applied to spirits in heaven is proof that

the true conception has always lived in the heart of man. We call those spirits angels. And what are angels but messengers — messengers of God — who ceaselessly fly through the heavens to perform the errands of the Infinite Love? We are told that “Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for us.” We instantly feel that this declaration gives the true representation of the heavenly life of the Son of God. His spirit of interceding love could not cease its pleadings when he ascended. His heart could not cease to beat. No shroud could enrobe his soul in deathly stillness. No sepulchre of stone could imprison his untiring sympathy. Death would be the fearful event which man has sometimes supposed if it destroyed the characteristic features of the soul, as it destroys the garment of flesh in which it is clad on earth. The last prayer of Jesus before his crucifixion, and his first word when he rises from the sepulchre, breathe the same spirit; and when we hear him tell the disciples to “preach the Gospel to every creature,” we know that he “ever liveth to make intercession for us.” A similar conviction is felt when any true spirit leaves the world. The life of purity and love which was manifested on earth becomes the image of the life in heaven. The great company of the faithful and true who have departed, the cloud of witnesses, are not inactive spectators of the unfolding of the Father’s purposes. They do not stand still, idly to adore. They have a share in the grand work of the development of this universe of living souls. As each spirit approximates towards the Father it can repeat the words of Jesus, “My father worketh hitherto, and I work.” They have ceased to bear the

cross which was borne amid earthly labors, because the cross has done its work, and bestowed the spiritual energy which it imparts to all who bear it with consenting heart. But this divine activity of being which is fully born when the earthly cross has been outgrown, constitutes their life and joy. Once they fainted in their labors. In heaven, they faint no more. The Church above, and the Church beneath, are animated by the same spirit, and engaged in the same glorious work. Let not those despond who strive on earth to accomplish great works of love. They do not labor alone. All spirits are laboring with them. Let them not despond if human sympathy does not cheer them. A cloud of sympathizing witnesses compass them about. Let them not fear when the toil appears too great for mortal strength, and wearied nature demands repose. Those heavenly spirits "rest not day nor night." Heaven and earth work together, and their united strength must overcome the gates of hell.

We are not hastening to a world of repose, but to a scene of more glorious action. This is a clear deduction from the great law of spiritual existence, and it suggests the central idea in our conceptions of our future being. If we attempt to develop this general truth into minute particulars, and ask what special forms of action exist in heaven, no human wisdom can answer. Speculation can only venture cautiously to explore that unseen realm of life. We know, indeed, that the works of heaven must be redeeming works. There are loftier and lower spirits in its divine society; and they must delight mutually to communicate their thoughts of truth and light, and to aid each other in

ascending the mount of spiritual perfection and of glory. The progress of heaven must be gained by this outpouring of spiritual energy and life. And we need not suppose that this beneficent activity is limited to that heavenly society. How intently the spirits now in heaven must look upon the strivings of men! Who can say that those who were once connected with us here do not still come as messengers to us? Must they not long to come! With their divine vision they see through our present strifes, as we now see through the difficulties which clouded our childhood's days. They perceive that the trials that seem to us so great, are necessary agencies to unlock the secrets of our strength. Must they not rejoice to aid us! Sometimes we feel that we are encircled by these glorious helpers. Whence come these better thoughts, these quickening impulses, these whispers of truth? Parent, child, friend, who can say that you do not bring these heavenly influences? This may be only a fancy. Yet if it be a fancy, it is certainly a harmless one. And often, each heavenly impulse seems to possess a new power, when we think of the beloved spirits who may bear it to the soul.

Still, although such speculations may be wholly baseless, although we may be unable to form a picture of the employments in the Father's mansions, we can confidently revert to the great principle which has been presented. It is a world of intense activity to which we are hastening. And is it asked, "Where then can be its rest?" Its rest is found in its glorious activity. The declaration of Jesus, "My meat is to do the will of the Father in heaven," reveals the source of the joy of

heaven. This is not mysticism, although it may wonderfully, fearfully, transcend the general experience of men. This secret of heaven is shadowed forth in the experience of every human heart. What are the moments of highest bliss on earth? They are the moments in which man exerts every energy in the services of love. What joy is so deep as that which is gained amidst labors and sacrifices for those who are most dear! Heaven is not gained by release from duty. It consists in the love of duty itself. What was once a toil is changed into our chief delight. Duty is transfigured by the power of love. Can any joy in heaven be so great as the joy of fulfilling God's designs of grace, of becoming a messenger to bear the gifts of the infinite benignity to other spirits, or to distant worlds? Can any bliss transcend the bliss of becoming a breath of life to another soul, a healer of its diseases, an angel of the Spirit to begin, or to perfect, its regeneration? Can any work be more divine than the work of staying the fountains of sin and woe that have poured out their desolating floods upon the earth; the work of rescuing the fallen, and bringing back the lost, amidst the joy of heaven over the repenting ones? "They rest not day nor night." The rest is in the divine work itself. If the work should cease, the bliss of heaven must fail.

Let man contemplate this higher life of untiring immortal love, both in hope and in fear. When we picture heaven to our imagination, and behold its spirit embodied before our eyes, we can instantly discover whether we are now assuming the heavenly robes. How often man should contemplate the life of heaven with fear! He speaks of the rest that awaits him in

the grave. What is the nature of that rest for which he sighs? Does he look for rest from glorious works of duty, from the eternal law of responsibility which demands the highest activity of every power, or a rest from the strife against temptations which have not yet been overcome? Then this expected couch of ease may prove to be a bed of thorns. Rest from temptations that have not been overcome! We can gain no rest from them except in a perfect victory. The angels do not come and minister to the soul in sweetest communion, until the tempters have departed. Rest from duties that we do not love! God is too merciful to suffer man to be at rest in that unreconciliation. Rest in the grave! There are not two Gods in this moral universe, and man does not enter a dominion which is controlled by different laws, when he goes down to the tomb. If he makes his bed in hell, God is there. Man is "shut up unto faith" in this grand law of spiritual being. A life of inaction, here or hereafter, cannot bring rest. Such a life is forever haunted by the sense of obligations which are unmet. It hears perpetual echoes of the condemning judgment of God. A life of duty that we have not learned to love, here or hereafter, cannot bring rest. For as the duty becomes enlarged, the inward opposition becomes more keen and deep. We find our only possible repose in that spiritual condition in which we choose the work that God commands. Then our heaven is built upon foundations that are secure as the eternal Throne.

Let man's vain expectations vanish when he remembers the principle in the text. But when he begins to find joy in truth or in works of God, let him look up-

ward in assured and rejoicing hope. Let him contemplate the scenes in which the weariness of the flesh shall never check the impulses of the heart. Let him imagine the state in which the veils which here obstruct the sight shall be rent in twain. What glorious influences, what divine instructions, are there ! The soul is quickened and expanded here when it draws near to the wise and good, and catches their living words. And when Apostles, martyrs, saints of every age and clime, shall circle round the spirit, never resting, day nor night, in their ministry of love, — when it lives in the united radiance of innumerable angels of light, — when it draws near to the Master himself, and joins in the heavenly ascription, “Worthy is the Lamb,” — what glorious inspirations shall animate and exalt it ! The spirits already ascended rest not day nor night, in their flight towards a purer life and a more godlike joy. Rest not thou, O man, day or night, in the endeavor to gain the preparation for admission into this redeemed fellowship above, that thou mayest inherit its joy and peace.

DECEMBER 17, 1843.

XX.

VISIONS OF THE SPIRIT-WORLD.



A SPIRIT PASSED BEFORE MY FACE ; BUT I COULD NOT DISCERN THE FORM THEREOF : THERE WAS SILENCE, AND I HEARD A VOICE. —Job iv. 15, 16.

THE disciples of one religious sect speak of a spirit-world which they regard as existing behind and within this world of matter. The outward world is filled, interpenetrated, by spiritual forces and spiritual forms. Between that spirit-world, and this outward world, as they suppose, there is a perfect correspondence. Each object in Nature is the effect, and the mirror, of a particular spiritual truth and presence. Each literal declaration of truth in the words of prophets, or of the Son of God, contains a higher spiritual truth, waiting to be revealed to the awakened soul. Within every human form there is a spiritual body whose forces animate this outward frame, but which is prepared to live in the spirit-world whenever it shall cast aside this garment of dust. Earth with all its living forms, the visible heavens with their shining worlds and robes of glory, are but shadows of

that now invisible, yet present sphere. The spiritual world with its glorious company of living souls—departed friends, lowly disciples, the loving and the true—is not remote from us. That world is here. Those souls are here. All the dead are here; but we are not conscious of their presence, because we dwell in the flesh. Departed friends move unseen through the homes in which their earthly days were passed. We live and move amidst the thronging multitudes of the spiritual world, though unconscious of the glorious fact, as those who walk in sleep pass through the busy throngs of men. The cloud of witnesses are here filling the paths which we tread. When we lift our hand we touch their invisible forms. Communication between the spirit-world and this is not impossible. It is a necessity. The unseen ocean of spiritual life washes all the coasts of present being; and the waves and tides from afar forever come to bring their reviving influence to its shores. We cannot see these spiritual forms with mortal eyes. We cannot hear their swift wings as they fly on their errands of love and joy. Still their spirits pass before our face; and though we do not “discern the form thereof,” yet, in the silence of listening reverence, we may hear a voice, speaking words of truth, messages of God.

Such a faith may be called a creation of the imagination; a bright, and sweet, though startling fancy, but still a dream. And so it may be in some of its details. I dare not develop the grand idea of the spiritual life into such minute particulars. I dare not map the scenes of the spiritual world with such precision. I fear to paint in colors drawn from the present, the

unseen majesties of Eternity. Nevertheless, let the imagination give form and life to the truth which is involved in the representation to which I have referred. It is the legitimate office of the imagination to clothe the truths which reason accepts in forms that may waken our sensibilities, and “catch our dull affections up.” It is a mistaken and narrow philosophy which banishes such representations, and thus renders spiritual truths and the spiritual world almost as dim and impalpable to the soul as they are to the sense. We need to form conceptions that are filled with life ; pictures even of the spiritual world upon which the heart can gaze in love, until the open revelation comes. We need to think of the spiritual world in accordance with that philosophy which taught men to say “Father,” when they spoke of God ; which gave the revelation of the inscrutable One in an image that was most familiar, as well as most venerable and most dear ; which used words drawn from human relations, and held up an almost visible form for man to adore and love. That philosophy was no merely human wisdom, but flowed directly from heaven through the lips of Jesus. Let us form some image of the spirit-world and of its relations to this ; for, although we may err in some features of the picture, still, if we conceive of that world as all around us, and think of its spirit-forms as in all our dwellings — of departed associates as still within our arms, though all unseen — of ministering spirits as coming and going through all the chambers of the soul, until we seemed to hear their gentle and assisting voices — we cannot over-estimate the closeness of the connection between present and invisible scenes. No

idea of the intimacy of the possible communications between the spiritual world and this can transcend the reality. According to some representations, the imagination is bewildered in its attempts to conceive of the vastness of their separation. It seems to have no wings that are strong enough to bear it over the gulf which is supposed to exist between the two worlds. But, according to the spirit of a brighter faith, it is exhausted in the attempt to find language to express the intimacy and closeness of their union.

Let us leave the peculiar conceptions of all particular systems and consider the doctrine which they attempt to embody and enforce. Let us observe the facts which may quicken our perception of a truth that invests existence with such mingled glory and awe. We leave the philosophical proofs of the doctrine, and turn to those which flash upon us in the experience of life. The philosophical arguments may be conclusive; but they are abstract and cold. The evidence of consciousness is bound up with the life of the affections, with the profoundest experience of the soul.

"A spirit passed before my face." How distinctly we are taught by our own experience that the spiritual world, with its dazzling revelations, is unspeakably near; and that it is often partially unveiling itself to our earnest life! Before whose face has a spirit never passed? Who has never been arrested by a great thought of responsibility, by a vision of the mind of Christ, which seemed to be borne in upon the soul with unwonted, and almost oppressive power? We do not refer to the startling moments of life; to the awe with which we stand by the dying and the dead. But whose

soul was never thrilled by the trumpet call of truth? Perhaps it came at the parting of the paths when the responsibilities of life were first assumed, and the two ways — one leading into the midst of tempting indulgences, and the other into heroic struggles for noble ends — were both presented to the heart for its solemn choice. Perhaps it came in the experience of the difficulties of life's pilgrimage. But who has lived so far from truth, and sinned with such desperation, that he has never been overwhelmed, at least for the moment, by convictions of duty? They were not the habitual inmates of the heart, or the natural offspring of its ruling passion. They were natives of a higher sphere; and when they came, they brought fear and trembling with their presence. They were hidden from men; but they live again in the records of memory. They were flashes of light from the world of light. "A spirit passed before our face;" and though there was mystery in its coming, and we could not track its path, or discern the form thereof, though we silenced its solemn pleadings, yet we heard and knew its voice.

Some minds are incredulous in respect to all such influences. They scarcely believe in a message from the unseen world, unless the messenger appear in bodily and startling shape. They want to see the pale forms of the sheeted dead before they will believe that the departed may speak to them. In moments of profound feeling there are spiritual experiences which bring a conviction as deep as such a visible presence. Recall the life long past, the special sin of departed years; stand in the place whose associations remind you of relations to a friend or parent now gone to the grave, relations to which you were unfaithful or false; —

think of a transgression against those who were so dear, and to whom you can offer no atonement now ; — let imagination picture their look of gentle reproach in these hours of thought until you can almost see their actual forms, and a spirit shall seem to pass before your face. Such recollections have come to guilty men and “made all their bones to shake,” and “the hair of their flesh to stand up.” They were conscious of a voice of judgment whose tones did not syllable themselves into words, but which fell upon their startled souls, and called forth a torturing self-reproach. They were solemn echoes of the eternal judgments which were then passing against them in the mind of God. Will any man presume to call these monitions out of the deep places of the heart mere imaginations? They go with the spirit wherever it goes, and haunt it with a more tormenting fear than the spectres of superstition. They are unquestionable witnesses to the reality of a higher enduring realm of truth and life, with its everlasting throne of judgment.

“A spirit passed before my face.” These revelations of the reality of the invisible world of truth come by the necessity of our nature. And if we were to estimate their number, we should count every momentary self-reproach, every admonition of conscience, every pang of remorse in every human heart, through all the ages. The spiritual world interpenetrates this world in which we live, and reveals itself to our consciences in unnumbered ways. It is near to the transgressor, and he cannot escape its presence. It seems to encompass the guilty, and compel their unwilling lips to confess their shame. And if it thus encircle those who desire

to escape its revelations, if it is bound up in an inseparable union with the sense of guilt, how clearly will it be revealed to loyal hearts ! Let a man take a great principle of duty, one of the grand laws of the spirit of Christ, and unfold its applications to thought and action ; and what visions of moral beauty will reveal themselves when he draws the picture of a life in perfect harmony with its requirements ! What dread discriminations of conscience as he measures every act by the standard of a perfect integrity, what systems of moral truth which would revolutionize the life of men and of nations, will then be unfolded to his mind ! Conceptions of purity that cannot come or go without conferring a blessing upon the soul, will then be his. Such thoughts appear whenever he attempts to ask what absolute truth or love requires in human action ; and they wear a beauty that seems too fair to be realized in this world of frailty and of sin. They require a purity that we postpone to a future life, and regard as the attribute of a heavenly state. Yet, although so high, they seem as true, as undeniable, as the most imperfect maxims of common duty whose transgression is termed atrocious crime. They are rays from the eternal light of a higher world shining down upon the meditative soul.

Or, once more, let a man pause to estimate the worth and the possible greatness of life, until it unveils its mysterious grandeur. Let him consider the worth of a nature whose nobler powers have been illustrated in the sanctity of saintly souls, and received one perfect expression in the spotless life of Jesus. Let him think of the greatness of its responsibility, of the divinity of its hope, of the immortality of its affections. How mean

will then appear the temptations that have overmastered him, and the vexations that have disturbed his peace! Life will then reveal its true divinity, and he will seem to stand in the spiritual position of Jesus in the wilderness, when the united diadems of the world were too small to be weighed against the slightest disobedience to conscience. Then the soul stands by the shore of the great ocean of spiritual being, and a life-giving breeze comes from afar, to invigorate its fainting purposes, and to bring the breath of resolution and health. Undefined, but holy influences and impressions, sway its deepest feeling. Convictions of duty, immortal aspirations, which have their birth in heaven, come with inspiring power. A spirit passes before its face whose presence is felt in solemn pleadings, in whisperings of conscience, in thrills of awe. It may not discern the form thereof; but, in the silence of such meditations, it hears a voice which it knows to be the pleading of the Spirit of God.

It is difficult to revive the memory of those moments of life in which the heart was moved with unusual power by the highest truths; moments in which influences that were as far above the common level of moral feeling as the spirit of Jesus was above that of the multitudes in Palestine, seemed to sway the soul. The recollection of such brighter hours fades in the habitual mastery of other feelings, as day gradually darkens into night. Still, every heart has known such heavenly visitations. The Spirit has come to call it away from the frequent meanness of its life, and to raise it above the temptations and sins of the world by its heavenly power. Out of the consciousness of every living soul

we can draw the proofs that man lives in two worlds; the spirit-world and this. Their influences mingle together in his experience. Even the most sinful life has known its better moments; green spots in an almost universal desert. How true to the deep things of human experience is the representation that angels and demons both attend the soul in its pilgrimage! Man hears the beguiling plea of the tempter; and yet, amidst his manifold enticements, he recognizes holy voices which he instinctively ascribes to spirits from a more blessed sphere. The spirit-world is breaking in upon this. A ray from its eternal light sometimes suddenly shoots across the darkest scenes. The consciousness of infinite relations and eternal responsibilities is developed in every heart until it trembles. Spirit-messengers pass before our face. Though we remain in an habitually unbroken sleep, we have had our hours of waking. Though the tumults of feeling often drown every better pleading, yet there have been seasons of silence when we have heard a voice.

“The sky is as a temple’s arch;
The blue and wavy air,
Is glorious with the spirit march
Of messengers of prayer.”

Man lives in two worlds. Influences from a higher sphere descend upon his heart. Waves from the unseen ocean of spiritual life continually roll in upon the shore of present being. Who, indeed, really disbelieves in this higher sphere? In whom is the consciousness of its presence too dim to confirm such an argument as we present? What confession must man make respect-

ing himself, if he affirms that no such holy intimations have been known in his experience? In what rayless darkness must those souls live who have never seen such stars of light in their moral night, at once the witnesses to a realm above, and the guides to him who brings the perfect day! Who can really disbelieve in this spirit-world excepting those who have had no experience to qualify them to give their testimony? But who have been believers in the nearness of the spiritual world, with its divine communications to open hearts, with its angels flying over the world of human life and human fortunes to sound their heavenly trumpets? We do not ask who have believed this doctrine as we believe it? But who have been its true believers? The faithful disciples of every age who have silenced earthly passions, and caused the heavenly voices to become articulate to their ear. The pure hearts who have attained to the consciousness of God's presence, in the constancy and fervor of their prayer. The brave souls to whom truth and right were realities for which they could live or die; to whom the voice of the Law-giver in the soul possessed a supreme majesty, before which magistrates and kings must keep silence. They have believed who have entered into this spiritual world in actual experience. How beautiful has been the language of this living faith in all ages! It sees the Living God, not an abstract Law. It beholds in Providence the direct agency, the immediate presence, of the Father. Every thing is personified by its devout feeling, and it speaks of ministering angels as waiting upon its steps. It peoples earth and heaven with forms of loveliness, and knows no solitude in which it is not

surrounded by blessed spirits, and assisted by celestial hands. Unbelieving men may question its language, and deny its bright intuitions, its firm convictions. The coldly reasoning mind may regard the invisible spirits of which it speaks, as creations of a devout imagination. But these forms of speech are only the imperfect attempts of the heart to represent and express the truth which it accepts. No human language can fully unfold its divine faith; for, amidst its most brilliant imaginations, its enrapturing visions, it remembers that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

How significant is the language of Jesus when he speaks of himself as in heaven while he talked with the multitude! It suggests the idea of the interpenetration of the spiritual and the present world, and shows that true hearts, at the same moment, may live in both. The soul of Jesus was open to every call and duty of the present world. He seemed to be absorbed in them in a tireless devotion. Yet his heart was open also towards the invisible sphere. Out of the realm of absolute truth he drew his moral judgments and his words of heavenly wisdom. The veil between these separate scenes became transparent to his eye and heart. Every step was illumined by the light of the upper world. Heavenly messengers spoke to his soul while the voices of disciples sounded in his ear. Angels ministered to him in his temptation, and stood around him in his agony. Here is the perfect illustration of a truth which faithful disciples, though walking in distant steps in the path of their great example,

begin to understand. Like soul and body, the spirit-world and this are linked in mysterious union. If man lives in the fleshly life, the soul seems to sleep and well nigh perish. If he lives in spiritual affections, he soars out of the body's weakness and decay. So if he lives in material things, the spiritual world becomes unreal. But if he lives in these visions of purer truth, they assume a substantial form, and seem to speak in clearer tones. How clearly the heart will then discern the presence of God, like an eternal sun! How trustingly it will look up to Jesus as an ever-living and present Saviour! How distinctly it will behold the land of immortal life, and see the light which changes the gloom of death into glory!

“ Our Father's house on high!
Home of the soul! how near,
At times, to faith's foreseeing eye,
Thy joyous gates appear!

We hear at morn and even,
At noon and midnight hour,
The choral harmonies of heaven
Seraphic music pour.”

Then these visions will no longer be accusing spirits, passing before our face to cause the heart to falter, and “the bones to shake,” but loved, familiar voices. Then holier thoughts, sweeter affections, will come from the invisible heights, like a river full of the water of life. The source of the stream is veiled in mystery, and it flows onward to an unknown realm. But it rises from the fountains of the upper world, and it rolls on to the ocean of love around the throne of God.

AUGUST 18, 1850.

XXI.

SPIRITUAL EQUALITY REVEALED THROUGH SUFFERING.



THERE THE WICKED CEASE FROM TROUBLING ; AND THERE THE WEARY ARE AT REST. THERE THE PRISONERS REST TOGETHER ; THEY HEAR NOT THE VOICE OF THE OPPRESSOR. THE SMALL AND THE GREAT ARE THERE ; AND THE SERVANT IS FREE FROM HIS MASTER. — Job iii. 17, 18, 19.

IN words of poetic beauty, but of startling power, the text describes the equality to which all men are reduced when they go down to the grave. It pictures the results of that great law which compels worldly pride to tremble, and which inspires the most abject on earth with exulting, though deferred hope. What a dramatic impressiveness there is in the fellowship which death creates between those who knew no fellowship in life ! The small and the great are there ; and the serf sleeps as royally as the king. God sends a decree of emancipation to the slave, and the bondman and the master are placed upon the same level there. Beneath the sod of the battle-field, which was once

gory with the blood of contending armies, the combatants rest peacefully, side by side, in the crowded ranks of graves. Re-open the long-buried dwellings of the city that was suddenly overwhelmed by a flood from the volcano, behold the still remaining forms of the small and the great, in the attitudes of fear or flight in which they were overtaken by the same inevitable destruction, and you see an appalling illustration of the truth which is pictured in the text. Walk through any city of the dead in which the departed have been laid, one by one, but in which whole generations are gathered now in the common fellowship of dust, and the same truth is enforced with equal power. Men travel in widely different paths in the midst of life. They forget that they are brothers amidst these outward separations. But they begin and end their journey in the same common helplessness ; and their thousand varying paths converge into the narrow portals of the sepulchre. How many moments come in life in which the lesson of the text is impressed upon the imagination and the heart in appalling clearness, in connection with the contrasts of condition which the world presents ! It sometimes startles the strong man with the conviction of his frailty, in the fulness of his strength. It overwhelms him with the sense of his helplessness, when his strength ebbs away. It thrills the haughtiest spirit, and bows it in humiliations in the closing moments of existence. Not only are the small and the great reduced to the same level in the grave ; but they are prostrated in the same consciousness of their dependence in moments of profound experience, before they lie down together in the dust. It can scarcely be more fully realized in the hour

in which each soul passes through the gate of death in the same conviction of unworthiness, and trusting in the same mercy, to stand before the same throne of judgment, than in these solemn moments of present life.

But the text suggests a train of reflection which is more attractive, and, in one respect, more impressive also. When we see death enter every earthly home to bring the small and the great, the servant and his master, alike beneath its sway, we not only realize the equality of helplessness to which all must be reduced, but also the equality of spiritual experience to which all may be exalted. Death not only prostrates every form of human greatness upon the same bed of dust. It not only introduces each soul into the unseen world, and leads it up to the same judgment-seat to receive its sentence, but it has another and a more spiritual office. What kindred ties of feeling it creates ! What profound sympathies of intense, though sorrowing, affection it awakens ! How it calls forth the deepest things in the human heart, and binds men together in the experience of kindred griefs, in the fervors of that trusting prayer, and living faith, to which sorrow often leads ! Death comes to introduce men into the same world of spiritual thought and life ; to open the same heaven to human hearts even here, as well as to translate them into the same heaven when it leads them through the tomb.

In the sublime language of the Psalmist, "The Lord beholdeth all the sons of men ; He fashioneth their hearts alike." The meaning of that expression is oftenest revealed through the experience of grief. What a broad and enduring foundation for sympathy is laid between those who have greatly suffered ! They have

alike mourned over the lives of early promise, or of matured excellence, which have vanished from their sight. Every other incident in their history may be unknown; yet those who were strangers a moment ago are felt to be brothers now, in the fellowship of life's deep experience. They may be separated from each other in opinion, feeling, taste, as widely as man can be separated from man. Still, in the feelings which are stirred when the deeps of the soul are broken up, they are one. When we know that men have lived and felt so deeply, their features are changed, and become transfigured in our sight. The lines which grief has furrowed upon the countenance, and which were formerly repulsive, now become lines of light, radiant with the spiritual life which they express. It is a most instructive, and a most impressive thought, that the deepest life of these ten thousand outwardly differing homes is the same. The precise facts of their experience may be unknown. We may recognize no common bonds of sympathy. But the same sorrow has been known beneath every roof; the same struggle of the heart when it first felt that neither effort, nor prayers, nor tears, could avail to save those whom it loved; the same struggle against the suffering which it was impossible to escape, and which it seemed equally impossible to meet. There affection has revealed that unfathomable depth and power which makes all human words seem but mockery. There, perhaps, an agony may have been known, which seemed like that mysterious agony of the Son of God. All those dwellings have been hallowed by the presence of the dead, and by the humble and lofty thoughts which that presence brings. And there also, at least in

some of those unnumbered homes, Jesus has seemed to come to repeat his divine words of consolation, and to speak to lowly hearts as he once spoke to the sisters at Bethany, in the midst of their grief. Every thing that is most lovely in human affection, every thing that is most touching in human experience, every thing that is most holy and peaceful in prayer, may have there been known. There men have worshipped the same Father, and repeated the name of the same Redeemer, and looked up to the same Heaven. There have been experienced the unfathomable things of the human heart, and the unsearchable things of the Comforter of God. Hath not God fashioned our hearts alike? Can the lesson of human equality be more impressively taught when we see the small and the great alike going down to the grave, than when we see them alike lifted up to the same spiritual experience in life? And who have not known, or must not know, this same great experience of sorrow? It comes to all excepting the young who fly back to heaven as soon as their feet have touched the earth, and who do not need this discipline of sorrow with its bitter, yet blessed lessons.

It is frequently said, "Go to the burial-places of the dead to learn the real equality of men; their common frailty, their common dependence before God." But go into the living world and learn the lesson as clearly from the experience of life, as from the myriad graves of men. Learn it in every dwelling from which the dead have been carried out. Learn it from the high and the low alike, who, like the widow of Nain, follow an only son to the sepulchre. Learn it from every heart whose holiest affections have been called forth by the startling

ministries of Providence and the angels of grief. The fancied and false distinctions of life flee away before every mighty feeling in human nature, until "there is no place for them," as the earth and heavens flee away from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne. The world is crowded with illustrations of this glorious truth. Parental love is the same everywhere, alike when it hails the coming of the child from heaven, and when it looks sadly, yet trustingly, up to the heaven into which it has quickly re-ascended. Every mother—let it be reverently said—seems to see a new star stand over the place where the young child is laid; a star of joy and hope which becomes a bright witness to the Father's presence, and which clothes the paths of earthly duty in new light and gladness. When we see love bring the same transfiguration over every mother's face, worldly differences are as entirely forgotten here as amidst the universal fellowships of heaven. The poverty of the manger and the splendor of the throne are then alike unseen. And the slave-mother, whose child has been torn from her breast, may be found to be as far exalted in purity of affection above those who trampled upon her heart, as the love of heaven is exalted above earthly lust. When I look at the manifestations of these sweet and strong affections which unite men in tender relationships, which invest home with a hallowed light, and make the world beautiful and joyous, I see that the heart of God beats in every human breast, as his light cheers every human dwelling. The small and the great are equally exalted; and the servant lives in the same glorious world as the master.

The same fellowship is equally revealed in all genu-

ine spiritual experience. Every emotion of childlike religious trust, every humiliation of sincere and lowly, yet lofty penitence, every throb of grateful adoration, every impulse to self-denying labor and Christ-like philanthropy, every instance of reverence for conscience, though in the humblest act of life, every pulsation of love to Jesus, which anoints his feet with tears, or embalms his memory in the heart — these are the same divine experiences in every man. The faith that sees the stone forever rolled away from the tomb, and triumphs over death, brings the same victory to every lowly disciple. The broken words of prayer from the lips of the slave, and the language of eloquent tongues in the hour of devotion, the rude outpourings of gratitude from intellectually benighted men when they gaze upon the Cross, and the benedictions of genius when it celebrates that wondrous love, flow from the same sacred fountains of religious life. The dress in which the spirit is clothed does not conceal its beauty in the sight of heaven. In the midst of life, as well as in the hour of death, pride is laid low. What dread rebukes it meets before that devotion to principle, that chastened, yet loving trust, that rapture of prayer, which unite the lowliest and the loftiest now in heavenly fellowship! There is a fellowship between those who stand upon the highest plane of spiritual life. Let genius do reverence before this diviner glory, as the wise men did reverence before the infant Jesus. Here is a revelation of a heaven into which the simple and the wise may alike ascend. Here is the life of God which is freely offered to every man; and as every branch, when it abides in the vine, receives the life of the parent stock,

so every soul which abides in this divine life receives the spirit of the Father and of the Son. When we see the unbroken procession that is going down to the tomb, imagination pictures the universal fellowship in which the true will stand as they cast their crowns before the throne. But when we see the divine life which is born on earth amid pangs and tears, when we see the trust and peace to which living hearts ascend, when we see those from the East and from the West, who have the seal of God upon their foreheads, and are already sitting in heavenly places with the true disciples of every age — we behold that fellowship, not merely as it is pictured to the imagination, but as it is revealed to sight. Then we echo the exclamation of the Apostle, that we are “heirs of God, and JOINT HEIRS with Christ.”

The world is slow to learn the grand office of all deep human experience, and even of Christianity itself. It is the noblest work of genius to detect and reveal the presence of the divine reason in all human souls, and to demonstrate that they are all alike the offspring of God; to show that the spirit of love is omnipresent in the spiritual and in the natural world, and that it kisses the brow of its humblest child in the same impartial goodness with which it paints the lily of the field. It fulfils its highest mission when it proves that the power to appreciate divine thoughts is kindred to the spirit which unfolds them in immortal words, and will be recognized as the same in nature when it receives an angel's tongue; that the rudest man who dies for truth, the manacled and degraded slave who perils every thing for freedom, is brother in courage, and, possibly, in disinter-

estedness also, to patriots and martyrs. But Christianity, more comprehensive and more divine than genius, develops new points of sympathy between human hearts in the profound depths of sorrow, and in the lofty heights of love and trust. It came in the manger, it brought both the shepherds and the wise men to its cradle, it made the lowliest its Apostles, it incarnated its divinest life in a strictly human experience, and amidst a poverty which had not where to lay its head, that it might reveal these points of universal fellowship. It knows neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free. It is not satisfied with an affection which embraces every human heart in a *condescending* compassion. It creates a sympathy and oneness of feeling. It does not bind men together by diffusing a spirit of pity for the weak and the benighted. It develops a spirit of reverence which bows with a homage, only less than worship, before the divinity which may be the inheritance of every soul. We have not yet learned to appreciate this divine office of the Gospel. We behold the intimations of its nature and power in those uprisings of philanthropy which are the heralds of a brighter day. But when the spirit of Jesus reigns in the hearts of his disciples, and the life of the vine flows into the branches, the last factitious separation between man and man will disappear. The communion of a divine life will establish the broadest fellowships of heaven in the homes of men.

This bereaving Providence fulfils a twofold office. It establishes a universal bond of fellowship as it carries all men alike to the silent grave. Death speaks to those who will listen to no other voice. It causes the

knees of pride to smite together, and tells the oppressor that he must soon be laid as low as those whom he tramples in the dust. But a far higher, a spiritual bond of fellowship is established by the same great Providence. It is strengthened by every throb of grief, by every tear that drops over every new-made grave. We overlook this design of the discipline of sorrow. Still how much it does to create sympathy between human hearts ! What unknown and unconceived separations would exist if we were not so often compelled to recognize our common nature, and our common need ! Men strive to live apart ; but God ordains events which bring them together, and for a time expel all other thoughts. He sends the son or daughter of pride to the feet of the lowly sufferer, to implore the sympathy which the heart must receive, or break beneath the weight of its anguish. Worldly differences are then forgotten in the communion of prayer. A truce is proclaimed to separations and enmities in the presence of grief and the grave. How quickly these transient recognitions of a universal fellowship would be changed into enduring and heavenly ties, if we permitted the deepest things in our experience to do their appointed work, and to make us one ! There is much deception in the world in the concealment of darker thoughts and evil passions ; but there is also an unintentional deception in the concealment of the heart's purest feelings. We fear to trust the pearls of the heart to those who may rudely trample them under their feet. When we pray, we go into the closet to be alone with God. In the hour of grief, we retreat from the throng of men. Yet we are not so widely severed as we seem. Solemn thoughts

are sometimes awakened in apparently superficial minds. Heedless men sometimes weep and tremble. The seeds of the noblest life are scattered where the dews of sympathy may cause them to spring up, and bloom, and yield the richest fruit. Sounds of heavenly harmony are occasionally called forth in every breast midst the discords of earthly passion. Could we look down into the depths of each other's hearts, could we summon up the better thoughts which have flashed upon them from a higher world, could we bring together the treasured gems of feeling which have been garnered up amidst the joys and griefs, the births and deaths, which have made their experience so changing and so profound,—the sympathies of heaven would begin to dawn upon us now. Deep calleth, and answereth, unto deep. God fashioneth our hearts alike; and, by His providential ministries, already makes us one. Welcome every event that brings together the small and the great; the servant and the master. Welcome every chain of sympathy, even though it be forged in the fires of keenest suffering. Think not only of man's common weakness when God changes his countenance and sends him away. Think of the common strength and exaltation of soul which may be revealed through the experience of weakness. Then God's darkest dispensations will be robed in light. We shall not seem to be going down into dust amidst the apparent victories of death, but to be ascending together, in an ever deepening and widening fellowship, towards the throne of perfect light and love.

SEPTEMBER 19, 1847.

XXII.

LIFE A SEALED BOOK.



AND NO MAN IN HEAVEN, NOR IN EARTH, NEITHER UNDER THE EARTH, WAS ABLE TO OPEN THE BOOK, NEITHER TO LOOK THEREON. AND I WEPT MUCH, BECAUSE NO MAN WAS FOUND WORTHY TO OPEN, AND TO READ THE BOOK, NEITHER TO LOOK THEREON. — Revelation v. 3, 4.

THE mysterious book to which the text refers, though it was sealed with seven seals, which neither man nor angel could unloose, was opened by the Lamb that was slain. Perhaps the reference is to the great volume of the Father's purposes, wherein was written the mystery of redeeming love, whose seals were first broken, and whose pages, radiant with light in every line, were spread open to human hearts by the ministry of Jesus. The elders are represented as taking their harps to sing a new song to the Lamb, "saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Still we might not easily satisfy ourselves respecting the special nature of that wonderful

book of which the writer in the Apocalypse speaks. It is of little consequence that we should. The world is full of mysterious books which no man can open. We not only find it so when we look up to the great book of the Eternal Providence, but also when we look at the smaller book of every man's experience. Extend your view over the wide world, and observe how, through tumult and convulsion, through earthquake and fire, during unmeasured geologic ages, the earth itself slowly passed from chaos into order, and became prepared to be the abode of life, and joy, and beauty; — and how, through strife and bloodshed, through moral convulsions, still more tremendous, the moral world is slowly progressing towards spiritual order and heavenly peace. What awful mystery hangs over every stage of this providential development! Questions arise at every point which no man can answer. Why does an Almighty Father lead man and nature through this prolonged infancy of sin and imperfection? Why must this dread baptism of fire and blood come to the children of the infinite Love? Contract your observation to the simplest act which touches the conscience, to the slightest wave of feeling that rolls across the human heart, — consider its origin, the responsibility which it implies, the eternal consequences which it involves, — look even to the smallest atom of life that floats in the sunlight, and you find mysteries again that are quite as difficult to solve. There also questions arise at every point which man can neither answer nor comprehend.

But we do not wish to direct attention now to any broad views of this inscrutable Providence. Consider

the book of each man's individual life. Observe the mystery in which every one of us is walking. See how wondrous is the earnest experience of every human heart, in its grief or in its joy, in each throbbing pulse of its life.

The simplest observation of life, even in its external aspects, startles us with a conviction of its mysteriousness. How earnestly we long, at certain moments, for one glance into the book of the future, to see what things are written there! We do not now refer merely to the possible exigencies of life by which we may pass, by a single step, from joy to-day into agony to-morrow. For, as the blind grope on in their darkened way, in an uncertainty which thrills every human heart, with no power to determine whether they move in a path of safety, or approach at every step the brink of a precipice, so we all move blindly along, in helpless ignorance whither the next step may lead. We leave these fearful exigencies of experience to refer to the issues of daily life. What are the distant but sure results of those different courses of action which offer themselves to our choice? Do they lead to success or to defeat? Is joy or sorrow folded up in that unknown future which stretches on before our own life, or before those who are far dearer than life? Will the seal of God, or the brand of guilt, be hereafter placed upon the brow of the child that nestles in our arms in innocence? The innumerable attempts in every age to find some means to foretell the future, the superstitions to which men trust, the readiness to yield to any absurdity or deception that promises to satisfy their agonizing desire to penetrate this veiling cloud, and to predict the com-

ing destiny, — sufficiently attest how keenly they have realized the mystery in which they live. Mystery in life! Sometimes it seems too great for humanity to bear. Have we never felt it so when we were standing in some great crisis of our experience, in which every thing seemed to depend upon that moment's action, and yet not one assurance could be gained to relieve our uncertainty, or to intimate whether our hopes would be forever realized, or forever extinguished? I am amazed at the depth of divine trust which is demanded by this simplest view of life. Man must live with affections that cling to friends around him now with immeasurably greater tenacity than they cling to life itself; and yet, as he gropes on in his blindness, he cannot know that the next instant's mistaken step will not involve the loss of every present joy. What intimations of the majesty of our nature appear in the difficulties and mysteries of life! We are not weak and feeble creatures, unable to bear the bitterest and severest tests; unable to walk, with sustained hearts, while questions that rack the soul receive no whisper of reply; unable to bear the sharp contradiction of feeling which is involved in a condition that stimulates intense desires, yet demands a perfect trust. Were the voice of God to break the silence, it could not more distinctly declare the high nature and calling of the soul than it is declared in the very position of humanity, amidst uncertainties and mysteries that demand this diviner strength.

How many views of life may be presented which suggest similar reflections! The whole of human experience is a book which no man can open. Let us

spread out the records of memory, and trace the events, the changes in our history, that we may discover how we have been led to our present thought, feeling, life. In the providential history of each human heart, there are written things as wonderful as those in the chronicles of nations which awaken the astonishment of the world. Not as we planned, have we been guided onward. How often have our apparent successes proved to be misfortunes, and temporary defeats an enduring victory! Where we looked in hope, we have sometimes found only disappointment; and then, in the midnight of our despair, the light has wondrously begun to shine. In the guidance of human lives, as in the government of the Universe, Providence carries forward its purposes in mystery. Sufficient success is granted to man's careful wisdom, and persevering energy, to rebuke the recklessness which usurps the name of trust. The neglect of this judicious labor is manifest insanity. And yet sufficient uncertainty is involved in all human experience, and all human efforts,—as blessings open where we have labored least, and disappointments come where we have toiled the most,—to thrill every man with the conviction, that it is not in himself “to direct his steps.” An unseen, yet almighty hand guides his feet into paths which he would not willingly have entered, but in which, he learns, at last, that it was most needful for him to walk. What mysteries rest upon the development of these rejoicing, suffering, human hearts, as their life is built up through mighty struggles, by which their crosses are changed into their crowns, and the vision of immortality shines upon them through the gates of the tomb, and peace is obtained

through contests, and rest is won through the experience which comes in the gardens of agony! And what mysteries of love there are in this over-ruling Providence; mysteries which the pure shall recount to each other in the heavenly world as they review the previous periods of the r existence, and trace the guidance of the Almighty Hand! We shall first learn the wondrous love of that heavenly guidance in the coming Eternity, when the now mysterious book of life shall be unsealed.

But let us not only observe the perpetual uncertainty in our lot, and the wonderful events of our past history. Let us consider our life still more closely, and attempt to trace the development of the soul. All human feeling, all that is great and glorious in the heart of man, is clothed in mystery. There is mystery in its source, and in every stage of its progress. Whenever we attempt to study the progress of our own spiritual life we are constrained to say, "How wonderful is the birth of many of our purer thoughts and holier impulses!" We strive in vain to trace their parentage. While we sit weary and faint at heart, a new impulse comes to revive the spirit, as the breeze comes in from the sea to refresh those who sigh for its cooling breath. It is a new breath of life from the bosom of that mysterious ocean of spiritual being which encompasses every soul.

"Sometimes a light surprises
The Christian, while he sings;
It is the Lord who rises
With healing on his wings."

From afar, from the depths of the unseen world, it

comes, like that mysterious moving of the Spirit which Jesus compares to the wind, whose voice we hear, whose power we feel, but whose birth-place we cannot see. From whom do such quickening impulses, such refreshing visitings proceed? Are they not the felt presence of Him who breathed into man a living soul, and who pours out perpetual benedictions upon the offspring of his love?

Man not only receives these wonderful refreshments in his fainting moments; but a similar mysteriousness attends the development of his purest, most habitual feelings. It is not wonderful that man has sometimes ascribed every thing that is holiest in himself to the agency of the Divine Spirit, independently of human effort. It is only an overstatement of the intimations of all genuine spiritual experience. What causes the light which thenceforth never dims, sometimes suddenly to break in upon man's bewildered mind, as a sudden glory sometimes shines through the thick veil of clouds to illumine all the landscape? How many, like Saul of old, have found "a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, shining round about them!" What causes the pure tides of affection sometimes to set in upon the heart, until they seem to cover the whole of life with their refreshing waters? Like the tides of the ocean, they obey a divine attraction. Men speak with more literal exactness than they realize, of the interpositions of the Spirit in the development of the life of the soul. Man can do nothing, directly, to create his deepest and holiest affections. His agency is wholly indirect. He can place himself within the circle of those influences which will awaken them into life. He

can look up to revelations of the Father's love, and open the heart to the entrance of his Spirit, as he opens the windows of his dwelling to admit the morning sun. The Spirit flows into every soul when all hindrances are removed from its way. Man can open, or he can shut, the door. He can admit, or exclude, the heavenly pleadings. By his *indirect* action, he can decide the tremendous question of his moral life or death. Still, he can do nothing, directly, to produce that moral life in the recesses of his heart. He is as powerless to *create* that life, as to create the soul itself. Man opens the volume of his heart ; but it is a divine hand which interposes and mysteriously writes every word of life and love upon its pages.

This conviction of the mysteriousness of the soul's truest life increases with the growth of feeling and the development of thought. In our inexperience, before our strongest affections are fully awakened, we know nothing of the dread and glorious powers that are folded up within the heart. Some live on and never know much of inward struggle and spiritual contest. The great deeps of their nature are never really broken up. There are no dark, mysterious depths in shallow streams. How can the untried spirit gain a vivid consciousness of the strength of human passion ! When the storm rises in its fierceness, when it swells and heaves within the breast and almost rends the very frame, then man is appalled by the revelation of the greatness of his capacity for joy or woe. In this living experience of the power of the soul, a true faith in its immortality is often born and nurtured into strength. Then, too, that great question comes, whose answer may be long delayed —

How can this almost uncontrollable tumult of passion be forever stilled? How can this restlessness of human feeling be changed into rest? We recall the content of childhood, before the trial of the heart began, and remember how green and bright appeared those fields in which we sported then. How shall we regain a peace like that, and find the heart's long-lost rest? When we thus learn the solemn needs of the soul, and realize the greatness of the work which is to be accomplished in its discipline, then this probation of present life, amidst such startling changes, such dread responsibilities, such thrilling experiences of unfaithfulness, appears most mysterious and grand. Then we look upon the lives of other men with a wondering interest and awe. What deep and touching experiences — what desires, hopes, pleasures, pains — what wrestlings of affection — what rejoicings and what agonies they may have known! What dark passions, and what damning sins, or what pure aspirations and what heavenly thoughts, are hidden from human sight, yet open to the eye of God, within their breasts! We look into each brother's face, and ask in what form the discipline of life has come to him. We look at these unnumbered human dwellings, and imagine the scenes of joy or grief which have been witnessed beneath their roofs. We walk beneath the quiet night when the world is wrapped in slumber, and imagine how many are praying in the fervor of devotion, or the sleeplessness of grief, and how many are sinning in the places of rioting, and the dens of sensuality, where the fires of passion, like the fires of hell, are never quenched. We look over the world in fancy, and wonder how many hearts are joyful, and how many, in the experience of

remorse, in lamentations for prodigal sons still unreclaimed, in the bitterness of grief—how many such are aching! Then life is a superficial thing no more. It is profound as the experience of the soul can make it. It is solemn as the judgment seat at which it will receive its sentence. It is grand and mysterious as that Eternity in which its issues shall be unfolded, and every seal upon its pages be unloosed.

We have only recurred to the most obvious illustrations. Each man can add indefinitely to their number whenever he recounts the questions that excite his wonder, and confound his penetration, as he studies the world around him, and the world within. What part of the book of his experience can he unseal or understand? The Past is mysterious; for he cannot explain the events which it brought. The Present is still more mysterious. The Future is covered by an impenetrable cloud. There is mystery in birth, and in death; in the grave, and in Eternity. There is mystery in the remorse of conscience now, and in the judgment which that remorse foretells; in the joy of purity and love, and in the heaven of which they prophesy, but which heart hath not conceived. There is mystery, indeed, in this outward world; in day and night; in every lily of the field, and every glistening star. Much more is there mystery in the life of the soul which it is the office of nature to quicken and unfold. Who that has deeply felt, has not wept much because no man was able to open this great book of mystery, neither to look thereon? We weep for these mysterious sufferings, and we weep for the peculiar mystery that often attends their coming. We weep because we do not see why the

world should be as it is, or why human life should be as it is. And where is the solace of the human heart beneath this veil of mystery? Is there no ministry which partially opens this sealed book? Jesus uttered the master-word of the universe when he taught man to look up to heaven, and to say, "Our Father." He did not thus remove the cloud which hangs over our experience here; but he gave the assurance which man needs while he walks beneath it. If this world were intended to be a sphere for knowledge, it is a failure. But it is intended to be the abode of trust; a sphere in which man is to rely upon the Father as he desires his perplexed and wondering child to rely upon himself. We cannot truly live for a day without this childlike trust. We must descend to indifference, or ascend to this loving confidence. It is well to look at the mysteries all around us, over our own, and every human life, that we may be driven back to this all-confiding reliance, and gain new convictions of its unspeakable necessity and beauty. It is well to contemplate these mysteries until we banish our anxieties for the present, or the morrow, or even for the unknown ages of the future. Then we learn that no agonizing thought can answer our questions, and that the same love will watch over us to-morrow, and through the distant Eternity, which watches over us to-day. Here, indeed, is an answer which is as clear and satisfactory to faith as if the book of the future were opened now.

How truly may we repeat the thanksgivings of the elders, and say, "The Lamb that was slain has been found worthy to open the book, and to unloose the seals." When Jesus placed a little child in the midst of

the ambitious and restless disciples, and said, "Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven," he unsealed the book of life. When the spirit of the child silences the ambition and the questioning of the man, heaven opens in his heart; and, in the confidence and peace of love, with the word "Father" upon his lips and in his soul, every mystery seems only a mystery of goodness, and he rests upon the bosom of his God.

JULY 23, 1848.

XXIII.

AGE LIKE THE NOON-DAY.



THINE AGE SHALL BE CLEARER THAN THE NOON-DAY. — Job xi. 17.

WE are told in the preceding chapter of this same book, that death is as “a land of darkness, without any order.” To human eyes it is so. It comes in silence and in mystery to the sinning and the pure, to those who curse and those who bless the world, with an entire disregard of the differences of character, or the circumstances of condition or of life. It smites genius in the noon-tide of its glory, and lays it in the dust by the side of the humblest. It summons the loveliest and the least attractive, the infant and the aged man, without discrimination, to pass away together.

How powerfully this view of death is often forced upon the mind! The young child, in the beauty and blossom of its earliest youth, droops and dies. The aged man, as full of honors as of years,* who long

* This sermon, first preached in Plymouth, was suggested by the death of Hon. JOHN DAVIS, of Boston, who was, for forty years,

since ceased to be a citizen here, but who remained in his native town until the maturity of manhood, and who loved it to the last with unabated affection, who was alive to all its interests, who delighted to illustrate its history, and to retrace the steps of his youth among its hills, and woods, and waters, — such an one, away from us, yet one of us still, calmly folds his hands upon his breast, when he finds that death is drawing near, and serenely meets the long expected summons. From the extremes of life, those whom we have known pass away together. The opening bud and the golden fruit, almost at the same moment, fall before our eyes.

I do not presume to portray the character of the venerable man to whom I have referred. I have only known him in his latest years. And although the beauty of his character made me stand reverentially in his presence, yet I have only been permitted occasionally to see the light of that serene and triumphant spirit which has been to others a continued sunshine. The associates of many years in important public trusts, in literary pursuits, in religious action, will hasten to offer tributes to his memory. And while they remember public labors with grateful honors, they will feel that nothing can be greater, or can deserve a deeper reverence, than the serenity of an age that was so full

Judge of the United States District Court in Massachusetts, and who published an edition of Morton's New England Memorial, enriched with valuable notes. Those who knew him will pardon the few words of personal reference at the beginning of this discourse. The author trusts that those who did not know him will also pardon them, as they introduce a topic which is appropriate to every example of a good old age. The preceding sentence refers to the death of a beautiful child, which occurred on the same day, in the Parish of Plymouth.

of freshness, and of a departure that was so sustained and peaceful.

“Thine age shall be clearer than the noon-day.” There may be, and there often is, an old age that is full of freshness, and which is closed by a death that seems brighter than the brightest life. Man can neither understand the constant mystery of the coming of death, nor the frequent mystery of its delay. Still, when it calls away the aged man, to whom it seems to come as a deliverer from approaching weakness and decay, he gains a partial revelation of the purpose, and the beauty, of its ministry. Indeed there is nothing in human character, or in this mysterious Providence, which suggests more attractive or more triumphant thoughts than the life and death of the old, when the heart retains its youth amidst the increasing infirmities of years, and the affections, instead of being chilled as the sun of present existence goes down, gain new warmth and fervor as the unseen world opens upon the departing spirit. Then a more than noon-day brightness attends the setting sun; and we behold an ascension of the soul while the body crumbles and decays.

There are two very different forms of character — one among the saddest, and the other among the brightest things of the present world. The first is sad childhood. Occasionally we behold a youthful face which bears the marks of premature care and gloom. Unfavorable circumstances have crushed the spirit in the beginning of its career. The shadows of evening shroud the morning, and the night of despondency, or of despair, hangs over the heart which should bask in the sunshine of hope. The glee of childhood has become a

dirge. Positive depravity is more revolting; yet no spectacle awakens deeper compassion in all hearts, human and divine, than the premature sadness which sometimes envelops and fills the youthful mind. It is a rare spectacle, indeed, even in a world so crowded with misery and sin; for the joy of early life clothes the rugged places with beauty, and the lips of the child often pour out the music of pure gladness while the parent's heart is slowly breaking. But it is more affecting because it is so rare; and when it has once been seen, it haunts the memory forever as the one mysterious, unforgotten image of woe.

The other form of character is joyous, unclouded age. Sometimes we behold an aged countenance upon which care and gloom have made no trace. Unfavorable circumstances have strengthened, not crushed the spirit. A radiance which was not seen around the rising, lingers around the setting sun. The glee of childhood has become an anthem of unbroken joy; and, in the consciousness of its growing life, the soul looks forward from a present which is illuminated by its bright affections into a more radiant future. A triumph which is thus complete may be almost as rare as the unnatural gloom of childhood. But how bright, how divine, it seems in comparison! Nothing can win greater admiration than the moral beauty, the perennial joy, which sometimes crowns a life protracted to many years, amidst disappointments and decays. Every instance of such a triumph is treasured in the soul's undying memory.

In many ways men exactly reverse the true process of life's development. They reverse it, first, in their

own inward experience. What is the meaning of this singular vicissitude in every man's condition, this alternation of laughter and of tears, this mingling of frequent joys with agonizing pains, this sure though gradual succession of bereavements, by which the men of many years are left as the solitary remnants of buried households and departed generations? It is intended to develop an inward strength that can become superior to change and decay. When the light of early youth departs, God does not design to lead us along a path of increasing loneliness and gloom. He designs to lead us up to the heights of a previously unknown and unconceived joy. Heaven lies around us in our infancy, and every thing looks bright to youthful eyes. Heaven is to live within us in our advancing years, and to gild the changing world with its unfading light. Life always becomes more grand and bright as the heart attains a stronger trust and a more fervent love. And if years develop that trust and love as they pass away, will not the highest joy be experienced in the latest age? The river does not become more shallow as it rolls farther from its source, and receives added streams from every land through which it flows. It attains its greatest depth when just falling into the sea. The sun of human life is not to be like the sun in the heavens, declining from its noon. Age is to be clearer than the noon-day. The sun of the soul, indeed, once risen, is never more to go down; and what we call its noon is but the first gleam of the morning of its perfect day.

This is not the description of man's actual life. How sad it is to see gifts and blessings pass away before we have gained an inward strength to compensate for the

outward loss ! The child leaves his home before he has gained the character which is able, without parental guidance, to conquer the world's temptations. Bereavements call us to comparative loneliness before we have learned to live so near to the Father that we can say, "We are not alone." But if the soul is really faithful, no change can come in this perfect Providence which will not deepen and brighten its life. No day can then close until its lesson has gone into the heart to remain there forever. And, as Jesus did not leave his disciples until it was expedient for them that he should go away, in order that his indwelling spirit might abide within their souls, so no honored and beloved life could then pass away until we had received its highest inspiration. Then we should be spiritually enriched by changing scenes, and fleeting years, and departing lives, as we should be enriched in outward fortune if every dying man were to pour all his earthly treasures into our hands. Would not life then be deepest when it was nearest to its end ? Would it not be most full of freshness amid the decays of age ? Would not its close then have a glory which never rested upon its noon ?

Let it not be said that this is only a theory. The true idea of life will always seem a theory in an imperfect world. The decay of the body sometimes causes a transient eclipse of the mind ; still, we must believe, that advancing years are not designed to darken, but to transfigure the present life. The venerable man to whom the beginning of this discourse referred, thus described the work of life's long and deep experience ; — "When it was summer I walked through the grove. Every tree was covered with foliage, and the whole

scene was clothed in beauty. When it was winter, I walked again in the same grove. The beauty had vanished, and every leaf had fallen; but I could then see the sky and the stars." Youth is glad; but living age knows a deeper, higher gladness. One finds the joy of fresh existence. The other the joy of spiritual life. If the soul does not soar upward to God on a swifter and more joyful wing when added years have brought accumulated testimonies to his love, if it does not gain a truer triumph when it has received new instructions and holier influences, if it does not make each new day brighter than the preceding, and each new year more full of heaven, — if its affections do not become like an ever-swelling flood which is rolling on towards the sea of love before the Throne, — the failure comes from man's unfaithfulness and not from the necessity of human nature. "Thine age may be clearer than the noon-day."

But men reverse the true process of life's development also, in respect to their interest in great movements for the advancement of the world, and their hopes of its progress. Youth and age naturally pursue different methods of action; but the elements which form a genuine zeal for God and truth should exist in their greatest power in those who have lived longest in devotion to these sublime realities. The faith which is only a flashing and bright conviction in the youthful mind, should become "substance" through the discipline of years. Truths that seemed beautiful at first, ought to gain new charms, and call forth a more intense and untiring love. Hopes of the overthrow of the world's giant-sins, and of the victory of truth and love, should

continually gain new strength and power. As life unrolls its manifold experiences, and discloses the blight which sin inflicts upon the heart and upon the world, as it presents moral degradations in awful contrast with the pure standard of human character, and as the soul more fully realizes the power of truth within itself to regenerate and bless, earnestness in the cause of human welfare should deepen into a martyr-like devotion. The wisdom of experience will temper the impulses of zeal. Still, maturer years should bring an increased wakefulness to every thing which may promote the great work of the world's redemption. The spirit of reform, instead of gradually departing from the soul, should become more intense as life brightens towards its perfect day. That beloved disciple who outlived all the Apostles who stood by Jesus in his earthly ministry, did not abate his zeal for his Redeemer in his extremest age. He could not fly from city to city with bounding feet, as in the days of youthful vigor; but he was ready to go to his martyrdom with a more serene and resolved heart. Every hesitation of feeling, every conflicting aim, had been subdued and crucified. He beheld new glories in the promised triumph of the Redeemer's kingdom. The veil before the spiritual world grew thinner every year. And as he rejoiced in these brightening revelations, the heart of the aged man became young in its clearer faith and hope.

How dark the world appears when we look up to the true glory of human life! It is not the design of Heaven, that youth should so exclusively begin, or repeat, the cry of reform in society. Sometimes, indeed, a thoughtful man is tempted to question whether there is

much of true zeal in those who seem to labor for human progress. The heated earnestness of youth and the inaction of age are often the results of the same spiritual condition, notwithstanding the apparent contrast between them. Before it realizes the discouragements in its path, and learns how hard it is to regenerate the world, youth rushes on to the work in apparent enthusiasm. But when difficulties and defeats are really met, and obstacles encountered at every step, it falls into that scepticism respecting success which chills human hearts and palsies human hands. When the love of truth itself, and not the dream of quick success, inspires the heart, man neither indulges impatient haste, nor sinks into sceptical inaction. Then zeal will be as enduring as the eternal truth for which it toils. As the pure spirits of the upper world glow with new fervor as the ages roll on, and fly with swifter wing and increasing joy to every new mission of mercy, so the divine life in human hearts constantly ascends to new activity and earnestness. Its age is clearer than its noon-tide; and its brightest day will be its last.

Man is not to renounce, but to "reverence the dreams of his youth." Experience will modify their form, and dispel some of their vain expectations. But it is a sad moment when the soul begins to lose its zeal for truths which it once longed to serve and to spread. It is a sad moment when it loses sight of that world of higher thought and purer love which enkindled its early enthusiasm, or ceases to pray and to labor for it, amidst outward discouragement, as Jesus labored for human redemption when not one heart comprehended his idea, or sympathized with his love. When love grows cold, and faith

decays, the shadows of spiritual death begin to shroud the soul.

The world looks upon youth with its quick sensibilities, its fresh love, its free and impulsive joy, as the most attractive manifestation of spiritual life. It takes the child lovingly into its arms to repeat the words of Jesus, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." It expects to find no such beauty in later years. And if the actual life of men is accepted as the illustration of its necessary development, there is no basis of hope that it can increase in brightness and beauty as it increases in years. But when we study that scene in the life of Jesus in which he took the child into his arms in his benignant love, we receive a brighter faith and hope. What a contrast there is between the child and the Redeemer! The trusting love that looked up to the face of Jesus was not like the infinite, the divine affection that looked down upon it with benedictions. Those fresh impulses of the infant spirit were not like that calm and unfathomable heart. The light in childhood's eyes was not like that divine light which beamed from the eyes of the Lord. The countenance of the child, though the fairest image of earthly beauty, did not possess the transfigured beauty which covered the countenance of the Redeemer. What comparison can be made between such extremes of spiritual life; between the infant and the Son of God! The lines of that great spiritual contrast grow more distinct as the scene is more closely studied. And whenever the life of Jesus enters into the human heart, to say to once tumultuous passions, "Peace, be still," to impart an increasing serenity to advancing life, and to change selfishness into disinterested love, then years

bring a brighter charm than they can take away. The enfeebled frame may totter, and the soul's activity be transiently crippled by the body's weakness. It is impossible fully to manifest the inward life amidst external decay; for the soul is made to rise out of the ruins of the body into a fresh form of being. A period must come in which it will seem too bright to linger in a body whose ear is dull and whose eye is dim, whose pulse beats too slowly to keep pace with the spirit's life. A period must come in which these fleshly chords will seem too weak to give expression to the heart's diviner love, and we are led to wish for death because the soul needs a new form to correspond with its growing life. But what other decay—if this expanding life can be called decay—can the soul ever know? What element of age is found in its noblest life? Does thought grow old as it wins new majesty at every stage of its progress, and presses on to new realms of light? Does love grow old as it gains new strength, and rises to its highest beauty in the last earthly moments, the last spiritual victory? Does devotion grow old as it presses nearer to the throne of God? There can be no age in the heart when it rises to new strength every day. How it harmonizes with these reflections to represent the angels as forever young! That representation images the truth to the heart of man. When the soul really lives, “age is clearer than the noon-day.”

Two forms of character appear in the world, which, although so entirely opposite in appearance and in reality, may succeed the bright life of childhood. Man *tends* towards one or the other in each step of his pro-

gress. In one, the soul seems to win no real strength to rise above the power and the change of circumstances as time passes on. The world grows dark as early blessings vanish, and as the home is bereaved. The excitements of youth lose their power; but no profound inward life supplies their place, and the soul sinks into a deepening slumber instead of rising into an immortal wakefulness. No divine truth, no grand work of love, commands its service and its homage; and, therefore, it it does not enter with enthusiasm into the work which is given to it to do. One joy after another departs; but heaven is never nearer in all that change. The heart grows old as the body decays. And when this form of character is most fully exemplified, we behold a saddened, slumbering age, neither awake to great human interests nor to eternal truths; losing its home among men every year, but not finding a home with God; in a world which the waves of time and change are overwhelming fast, without a resting-place for the sole of its foot. There is a desolation in which the brightness of the noon fades into deepest night; in which the lamps of life go out and the soul is left to wail in the outer darkness.

Turn to the other form of character whose inherent glory seems still brighter in contrast with this. In that, the advancing life of the spirit is continually placing it above the disturbing power of change. Years bear witness to new and greater victories. Trials deepen the serenity of trust. Bereavements minister to the faith which wipes away every tear. The invisible world of truth, the deep things of God are more clearly revealed to the meditative and believing soul. Heaven opens as

the world recedes. Here is no decay. When such a life is gained the soul can know no death. If age seem to enfeeble it for a time, it is like the eclipse which, for an hour, obscures the sun. The sun breaks forth again in splendor from every such cloud; and the soul, in like manner, breaks forth from such apparent decay. I know of its future heaven; for the eternal gates have been already opened, and bright rays from its life have blessed my eyes. And when it goes away, it is cheered by the same light from the Father's countenance which has always been its strength and its joy.

JANUARY 17, 1847.

XXIV.

THE PEACE OF GOD.



THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSETH UNDERSTANDING.
Philippians iv. 7.

THERE is a state of the soul that is the natural result of the supreme love of God, which can only be described by the word PEACE. It represents that condition of the heart in which there is an entire reconciliation of its affections to the will of God. It is a spiritual state in which there is no inward strife, no more rebellion against the commandments, or the Providence of the Father. Whenever the soul, by a sacrifice true as that upon Calvary, has crucified whatever has alienated it from the love of God, when the genuine idea of the atonement is realized in the individual heart, the result must be peace. Then the soul enters into a perfect harmony with the will of God, even in its most secret desires. Its peace is not a contingency, but a sure and natural inheritance, in accordance with an eternal spiritual law. It is not a peace which results from fear. The heart is not overawed into quiet by an authority

which it dares not resist, as the captured city is overawed into submission by hosts of armed men. Its state is like that better peace which comes when the conqueror breathes his own spirit into the vanquished city, and binds it to himself by a grateful affection. Then its inhabitants are no more servants, but loyal and loving citizens; obedient children. The armed hosts are no longer needed. The show of authority may cease, since every enemy is converted into a friend. No outward image, indeed, fitly represents this perfect spiritual peace. It not only brings the soul into harmony with all that it may once have opposed. It frees it from any rebellious, or even from any individual will. And, by degrees, it learns to say with Jesus, "The words that I speak, I speak not of myself. It is the Father that speaketh in me."

Our subject relates to the highest form of the divine life in the soul. It requires us to stand in imagination upon those mountain heights of love which we have never seen, except for a transient hour, in the most favored seasons of life. Nevertheless it is good to look upward in adoration to this divine experience. We thus strengthen our faith in the possibility of its attainment, and discover the path by which we may climb even to this summit of trust.

The text is introduced as a direct inference from the words, "Be careful for nothing;"—be anxious for nothing—"but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." According to the Apostle, true peace comes from that absolute trust which is produced by perfect love. It is the flower which springs from that root of

life. When the child places his hand within that of the earthly parent, there is an entire trust in his heart that casteth out fear ; and he walks amidst the darkness with no thought of gloom. And thus when man, with a like trust, places his hand in that of his Heavenly Parent, the true peace of God enters into his breast. And in proportion as he delivers himself from selfish anxieties, it will grow in beauty in his soul. When these anxieties are stilled by a commanding voice, or when the heart is drawn away for a season from their agitations, the bright vision unfolds itself as a reality to his rejoicing view. When the spirit of Jesus comes to say to the winds and the sea, "Peace, be still," there is at once a holy calm.

The transient visitings of this rest which are sometimes granted to man, confirm this theory of its origin. It is perhaps true to the experience of every deeply tried heart, that hours of wonderful calmness are known even amid the keenest trials. Those seasons of calmness come suddenly and unexpectedly, like the calm upon the lake of Galilee when the disciples were almost overwhelmed by the waves. When Jesus entered the ship, immediately it was at the land whither they went. It is because a mighty trial often most effectually stills every anxiety, that such intervals of composure come. How surely these deeper experiences silence for the time the whole crowd of smaller anxieties and fears which often disturb our daily life ! Then their clamor can no more be heard. We are taken as by force into a sphere of thought which they cannot enter. The busy world, whose pulse we have hitherto felt in every vein, lies then before the mind as the great city before

the eye, when the Sabbath stillness reigns, and every hammer sleeps by the work which it has been framing. We are left alone with a calamity that dispels all confidence in our own strength, and leads us in absolute dependence unto God. The friend, the child, stands on the brink of the grave, or is laid within it. We cannot but cry unto God. Even the Atheist must then pray. We go in sincerity to the Father's throne. And when we ask thus, we always receive. The greatness of the trial which shows our own weakness, leads to that absolute trust whose fruit is peace. We may have wondered to hear Jesus speak of peace in the last conversation with the disciples, when the cross was directly before him, and he could almost feel the cruel nails and the piercing spear. Even if selfish anxieties could at any time have disturbed his heart, in that hour he would have cast himself most entirely upon God, and found the truest peace. There is a new depth and sweetness in the serenity of the Redeemer in the moment in which serenity was most severely tried. As he looked upon the disciples in that closing conversation with a new thrill of affection that made his own precept of love appear like a new commandment, so he seems to have looked up to heaven with a more profound resignation that made him then most fully realize the serene peace of God. The descent of angels in the garden to strengthen Jesus, only images the thoughts of peace which naturally come in darkest hours, when the heart can say in trust, "Thy will be done." Hence came the peace which brave confessors and martyrs knew in their hours of peril, when they sang in their prisons, or amidst the fires of the stake. They entered upon the

life of the resurrection before the body crumbled into ashes. When the trust is entire, the serenity is unbroken. We are told, that, after the crucifixion, when "the door was shut" upon the world, Jesus appeared to his disciples, standing in their midst. And whenever the door of the heart is really closed against the vain anxieties that have disturbed us, after our own self-crucifixion, Jesus comes into our hearts and bestows his gift of peace. "Be careful for nothing;" and the "peace which passeth understanding" shall keep the mind and heart.

God mercifully sends the trial which awakens the conviction of our entire dependence and inherent weakness, that we may see the foundation of the true peace of the soul. But it is on account of our imperfection that this peace visits us only as an occasional angel, and does not abide within us as a perpetual guest. We do not constantly live in this entire dependence. Therefore it often happens that the heart loses all its serenity in the petty trials of daily life, when in heavy calamity it finds hours of genuine peace. Let the conviction of our own weakness, the foundation of absolute trust, once be lost from the heart, and, like the presumptuous, faithless Apostle, it sinks beneath the wave. The lake whose surface is entirely undisturbed, reflects back in their original brightness, the beauty and the hues of heaven. But when a breath of wind passes over it, a breath so gentle that it is scarcely felt upon the cheek, the mirrored beauty is broken and destroyed. So, when the soul lies open to the direct influence of the Father, He bends over it with a glory, and a smile of love, that, to the spiritual eye, seem faintly imaged in the fairest

scenes of natural beauty. Let the heart be still. No disturbing breath must trouble even the surface of the deep sea of its affections. Let it lie in an absolute repose, and the light of God's countenance shall shine into its profoundest depths. And why may not this peace become an everlasting possession? We perceive, and we can obey, the law by which it comes. "Grace is with us" forever, according to the apostolic salutation. In what, except in the heart itself, lies the want, if the peace which passeth understanding doth not keep it and bless it forevermore?

This inward peace is the fruit of an absolute trust. It belongs not to that state of mind which clings intensely, in hope or love, to any imagined arrangements of Providence, either in the present or the future. It arises only from that entire submission of the will which ceases to question or to speculate. When man begins to question the ways of Providence, his peace is lost. Why does it remove the young and the innocent, he sometimes asks, and spare the abandoned sinner whose presence is pollution? Why are some called by repeated bereavements to the grave, while others stand at the same hearth-stone in an unbroken circle through many years? Why does judgment sleep during long ages over the oppressions of the earth, and the wail of the injured seem to rise to heaven in vain? An allusion to this course of reflection will suffice. When we enter upon it, mysteries crowd around us with strange and fearful aspect. We cannot solve one of these perplexing problems. Clouds and darkness are round about the throne. Cease all this vain speculation. It is the universal temptation of man to say, "My lot is

strange and dark." In other circumstances, how easy would have been the way of life! Blaspheme Providence no more, thou short-sighted man, even by a momentary thought that God hath not placed thee in the best possible position in the universe for thy peculiar discipline! In things too minute to be seen by the unassisted eye, multitudes of creatures exist, not one of whom liveth without the Father. Shall He not much more clothe thee? Every such questioning is a confession of want of trust. Conform thyself to the circumstances around thee, and a perception of their fitness, unperceived before, will soon banish every doubt. Quicken the spiritual eye by a growing love and trust, and no instrument of art which would bring the wonders of heaven to view, could reveal such tokens of love as would then be disclosed in what before seemed mysterious and dark. We cannot overstate the implicitness of the confidence which this absolute trust implies. It fears to indulge in any speculations concerning the ordinations of God. Or, if it pursues such great inquiries, it is in an adoring gratitude which delights to trace the Father's ways, and not in the spirit which seeks a foundation for its reliance. It trusts before it questions. It still trusts, even though no light comes to bless its inquiries. Doth not God reign? — it asks in firm and joyous hope. And that one supreme, all-comprehending ground of confidence, embraces all imaginable causes of disquietude and fear, and soothes them to an endless rest. Man may picture to himself bright conceptions of the movements of this holy Providence, and of the glorious scenes which are yet concealed in the bosom of time. But these are not the foundations upon which he rests

his hopes. He may, and how fervently he sometimes must, pray for deliverance from present grief. He watches in Gethsemane and hears that prayer from the Saviour's lips in his hour of agony. But the spirit of unquestioning submission breathes out sweetly from the prayer. It trusts though it sees no deliverance, and is led to the cross. Calvary cannot destroy its joyful confidence. But it ascends the hill of shame and scorn, anxious for nothing save a deeper love; and in that cometh the peace which passes all understanding.

The longing heart of man could desire no more assured repose. It is the kingdom of heaven, the peace of God in the soul. It is "the rest that remaineth for the people of God." It may not dwell in the world without some transient, and possibly bitter trials; without some dropping tears. "Jesus wept." There was a scene of agony, even in the life of the Son of God. Tears may often fall in the present imperfect life, even though this confidence be all the while advancing in the soul. But they fall while the light of divine love is shining full upon the heart, and are like the showers which reveal the heavenly bow. The serene peace of trust! It may never bring thoughtless mirth. It may seem a grave joy. Perhaps no manifestation of its gladness may equal the excitement of worldly gaiety. But it is because the joy is too constant to admit of occasional excess — too uniform to come "with observation." The heart in which it abides is like a vessel whose contents are always mantling its brim. The least addition causes it to overflow. That overflowing may seem very small to the eye. But what a proof it gives of its perpetual fulness! The peace of God!

It is an absolute trust, as we have said, that leaves the heart as it were passive to the influence from above. Yet it is not a passive state of the soul. It is gained when we stand like mere channels through which the influences of God's spirit may directly flow. But we do not become free channels of this divine influence until we earnestly consent to the dispensations of an inscrutable Providence, and positively embrace the duty or the cross which it may assign. There can be no more intense action of the soul than when it puts away every trace of selfish desire in an absolute resignation. The manifestation may be quiet as the still, small voice. But it is the voice, and the life of God. We do not always recognize the highest power. We are awed by the storm. But the same power moves in the heavens when they smile upon the earth, and the earth reflects their glance of love, that in other seasons rides upon the winds. The chiefest energy of spiritual life seems to be in exercise in the contest with rebellious passions. But it is a higher energy which awes them into silence. It is a diviner strength which acts in the hours of the soul's peace, than in its seasons of warfare. Its repose is the serene strength of God.

It is good to look upward to this perfection of the spiritual life as well as we may with our unspiritual eyes. But exalted as it may appear, almost beyond our hope, there is no peace elsewhere. And how divine are the words of him who gained this perfect victory of love, amid the disquietudes, the struggling desires of the human heart! We look in vain into the countenance, and the heart of almost all whom the world has revered,

to find this rest for which the soul is forever longing. Some note of discord mingles in the music of their sweetest words. Some stain is upon the fairest robe. But one voice is lifted up in the ear of men which is the pure expression of this divine life. One countenance has looked upon man which wears the serenity of God. It is salvation for a world which has fallen into a wilderness of thorns to look there and be healed. And the same atonement must be realized within us all, or we dwell in endless disquiet. We are cast into the outer darkness, in a greater or less degree, until we gain that absolute love which is the true wedding garment for the marriage supper of the Lamb, and which admits us to a fellowship with his heart, and a participation in his peace. And why should we not seek this divine peace with faith in its coming? It does, indeed, pass all understanding. It will not come through any process of argument concerning the love of God, though it is based upon proofs radiant as the sun, and numberless as the stars. It comes through a life of unquestioning love and trust. It is born in the filial heart. It may be revealed to babes. If we crucify every thing in the soul that opposes the will of God, a trust will come which will say, in joyous confidence, that the heavens would be miraculously opened for the descent of divine messengers of mercy sooner than any needed blessing be withheld. It will rest in the sweet assurance that legions of angels would come to save us from the cross, were not the cross itself the divinest blessing. Let the soul live in this absolute trust, and although the outward blessing may be withheld, and the actual

crucifixion may not be avoided, the inward power shall always come to give "strength according to our day," and to impart "the peace that passeth understanding."

OCTOBER 4, 1840.

